SELF-BUILD HOMES

Social Discourse, Experiences and Directions

Edited by

Michaela Benson and **Iqbal Hamiduddin**

UCL PRESS

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Preface

Self-Build Homes sets out to consider how understanding the social dimensions of self-build might advance theory, practice and research. A relatively understudied phenomenon, the few key academic texts on self-build – Duncan and Rowe's 'Self-provided housing' (1993), Hardy and Ward's *Arcadia for All* (1984), and Barlow et al.'s *Homes to DIY For* (2001) – are still highly relevant, but do not reflect recent changes in housing policy and practice, housing provision, and concern over growing inequality of access to the housing market. This volume emerged out of the workshop 'Putting the social into alternative housing' convened as part of Michaela Benson's ESRC-runded research *Self-building, the production and consumption of new homes from the perspective of households* (ES/K001078/1). The workshop foregrounded the social dimensions of the alternative housing practices (in their broadest sense) that are often the subject of scholarly research but seem to take a backseat within broader discussions of alternative housing.

We feel that this volume is particularly timely given the renewed focus by policy managers and practitioners, as well as prospective builders themselves, on self-build as a means of producing homes that are more stylised, affordable and appropriate for the specific needs of households. Although there is undoubtedly a UK bias in this volume, we hope it has international salience: to help remind policymakers and practitioners based in countries with a healthy self-build sector why it is important to maintain it.

Through their focus on community, dwelling, home and identity, the contributions to the volume explore the various meanings of self-build housing, as these emerge in discourse and through experience. They encourage a new direction, within discussions about self-building, that recognises the social dimensions of this process, from consideration of the structures, policies and practices that shape it, through to the lived experience of individuals and households. In this way, the collection

builds on rich traditions of research and theory on housing and planning, alongside conceptual work on these themes drawn from across the social sciences.

We encourage each reader to reflect upon the question: 'Why self-build?' Many responses are possible depending on who is asked and which viewpoint they represent: self-builder, planner, policy manager, scholar or local resident. As with running an ultra-marathon or climbing Mount Everest, to which projects are often compared, self-builders themselves offer a range of motivations. We believe that these rational explanations tell some, but not the whole story; our aim in this volume is to provide a more complete and balanced picture.

Michaela Benson and Iqbal Hamiduddin
May 2017

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Michaela Benson is a sociologist and ethnographer based at Goldsmiths, University of London. Underlying her research has been a long-standing interest in the intersections of space, society and the individual. She is known for her contributions to understanding privileged migration, the micro-geographies of home, belonging and place-making practices.

Katherine Collins is an academic and creative writer working across the disciplines of sociology and life-writing, interrogating the relationship between evocative writing, identity and inequality. She works with arts-based methods like creative non-fiction and poetic transcription. She is a visiting fellow at the Oxford Centre for Life-Writing.

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Andreas Feldtkeller was head of the Office for Urban Restoration of the City of Tübingen, 1972–97. He oversaw the redevelopment of the historic old town, residential environment programmes and management of the French Quarter scheme. He was educated at TH Stuttgart and TU Berlin.

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Martin Field has been a keen advocate of community-led housing in its many forms for some considerable time, both as a practical member and supporter of different self-build projects and as a director of national organisations set up to help a variety of local projects to progress.

Elaine Forde holds a PhD in anthropology from Goldsmiths, University of London, and is part of the Morgan Academy at Swansea University. Elaine has conducted research into living off-grid in the DIY, eco-activist context. Her new research examines energy provisioning, renewable energy resources and community microgrid projects in Welsh rural villages and the African islands of São Tomé and Príncipe.

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Stephen Hill is a chartered planning and development surveyor, with over 40 years of public and private sector experience of housing, planning and delivering mixed-use development, urban extensions, new settlements and community-led neighbourhood regeneration. He is a Churchill Fellow, and has written extensively on housing, land reform, regeneration and citizenship.

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Kathleen Scanlon is Deputy Director of LSE London. She has a wide range of research interests, including comparative housing policy

(across all tenures – social and private rented housing as well as owner-occupation), comparative mortgage finance, and migration.

Ted Stevens is a former award-winning journalist. After building his own home, he founded the National Custom and Self Build Association. He then managed a research project looking at how other countries support and encourage self-build. He was awarded an OBE in 2014 for his various self-build activities.

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Self-build homes: social values and the lived experience of housing in practice

Michaela Benson and Iqbal Hamiduddin

Self-build housing is a topic of continuing relevance within the fields of housing policy and housing research. And yet it rarely appears in the pages of the academic journals in these fields, its reputation as a niche market being echoed in sparse accounts. While the seminal texts in this area offer a good starting point for such enquiries, it is also clear that they speak to different times and contexts. Even though there is currently a resurgence of interest – as we recount below – from government and practitioners, who see the scaling-up of self-build as a one of several solutions to the current housing crisis (see also Stevens, this volume), self-build is similarly marginal to housing policy.

Against this background, *Self-Build Homes* updates research on self-build to account for recent advances in housing and planning policy, while also bringing this into conversation with interdisciplinary perspectives – drawn from across the social sciences – on housing, home and homemaking. In this way, it seeks to update understandings of self-build by accounting for housing as a distinctly social process. It puts the social back into self-build. Through the introduction and exploration of the social values and lived experience of self-building, it provides insights into how individuals and communities are variously shaped by their housing experience. The volume is therefore underpinned by a conceptualisation of self-build that takes it out of its 'small and special box' – to quote Hill (this volume) – and recognises how it might cause us to reconsider the assumptions that frame our approaches to understanding housing – in theory, policy and practice.

Self-build: a note on conceptualisations

One of the guiding principles of this volume is to encourage dialogue across diverse forms of housing that we conceive of as self-build. But what do we mean by this? In the UK public's imagination, self-build is often understood through the lens of the popular television series *Grand Designs*, which showcases ambitious and often costly individual housing projects. This is undoubtedly one form of housing procurement that can be considered as self-build, but we adopt here the broader conceptualisation provided by Duncan and Rowe (1993), aimed at capturing a wider range of practices that draws on considerations around the provision and procurement of housing. As they emphasise, self-build describes cases 'where the first occupants arrange for the building of their own dwelling and, in various ways, participate in its production' (Duncan and Rowe, 1993, 1331). This allows for households to have more control over the construction process. As various examples attest, this might include, *inter alia*, state support for self-build, or projects might be undertaken in collaboration with other households, housing suppliers, practitioners and associations.

Revisiting this definition allows us to think again about the self and how this might be mobilised in the concept of self-build. Discussions of the benefits of self-build often focus on what these might do for the individual; there is a considerable focus on self-improvement, empowerment and accomplishment that embeds a fundamentally psychological approach to understanding the self – as a form of identity – oriented around the individual. Further, the focus on consumption and lifestyle that underpins a lot of the media depictions of self-build makes the explicit link between the home and domestic interiors as expressions of self-identity. Indeed, the title of Barlow et al.'s (2001) report, *Homes to DIY For* and Channel 4's flagship programme *Grand Designs* play on this sense of aesthetics. But this focus on taste and aesthetics might detract from the deeper sense of achievement that these homes signify to their owners. As Samuels (2008) documents in the case of suburban extensions, the value of these projects lies in the sense of pride and achievement at being able to create, thus in the practices rather than in the aesthetics of a project (see also Brown, 2007, 2008). And yet, the self, used in this way, is a misnomer; such evaluations identify the self as an individual in ways that distract from the sense of self-build as a thoroughly social process.

Our revised approach to thinking about self-build presented here is founded on an understanding of this as a social phenomenon embedded

within a set of social relationships; here the 'self-' signifies the relationship between the individual, household or group and the project of providing homes. Presenting self-build as a social process privileges insights into entanglements between the material and social structure of the home, and the building of relationships within households and within neighbourhoods. This shifts the focus towards the social identities of self-builders, but also to the social relationships that go into the production of new homes, whether these be within families, with contractors, suppliers and practitioners, and, in the case of collective or community projects, within groups. Approaching self-build as a social process infuses it with a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of self-builders and the social significance of self-build in ways that might otherwise be obscured.

With these considerations in mind, Duncan and Rowe (1993) provide a useful working definition. This allows not only for the model of sweat equity that is also common within wider understandings of self-build, but recognises diverse practices of housing production with a base line of recognising that it is individuals and small groups organising the provision of their (future) homes. Thus conceived, self-build functions not as a label that describes one discrete process, but rather as an umbrella term that can be usefully put to work to explore the range of different modes of housing procurement that start from the ground up (Duncan and Rowe, 1993; Parvin et al., 2011) and that share an understanding of the 'self-' as a marker of the relationships between agents and the process of providing/procuring homes.

Self-build then is a broad category of practice that involves households and groups who invest time and energy in the building of their own homes in various ways. Our ambition in extending this broad definition is to draw in and bring into conversation those interested in co-housing, co-operative housing development, community-led development, eco-housing – which some understandings of self-build might exclude – as well as individuals financing and organising the construction of their own homes. As Duncan and Rowe (1993) highlight, by adopting a description that centres on the provision of housing, it is possible to speak across a broad range of practices and to recognise those practices that might fall through the gaps when other categories are employed.

Self-build in housing crises

It is against the backdrop of housing constraints across European cities – and nationally in the case of the United Kingdom's continuing housing

crisis – that we are reminded of Duncan and Rowe's (1993, 1338) earlier observations on the economic drivers for self-build:

> In periods of economic difficulty and affordability problems in housing, self-provision often becomes a topic of increasing interest to governments, usually as a way of shedding responsibility for social housing … it has also been the case in Britain … self-provided housing, especially self-build, was increasingly seen as one means of filling the affordability gap.

The United Kingdom's housing crisis, which has developed from a long-term shortfall in supply since the severe economic problems of the 1970s (Whitehead and Williams, 2011) confirms this observation. Writing in 1990, Forrest, Murie and Williams stressed that the British housing market was one dominated by property ownership – the main form of provision is second-hand (Forrest et al., 1990; see also Saunders, 1990) – with the shape and structure of this market in turn influencing the aspirations and meanings that people attribute to their housing tenure. In the intervening period, little has changed; home ownership remains the predominant form of housing tenure in Britain and new housing procurement makes up only a very small portion of the wider housing market. At present, the supply of housing cannot keep up with demand, with house-building at its lowest peacetime rate since the 1920s (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011). As in the past (Duncan and Rowe, 1993), the conditions of the housing crisis have brought renewed government interest in self-build – from both the previous Coalition and the current Conservative governments. Celebrating the past successes of this mode of development, claims have surfaced propounding (a) the value of self-build to alleviate problems of supply and demand, (b) its potential to introduce more affordability into the market and (c) its role in bringing to fruition a more competitive market. Further, alternatives to the development of new homes by national housebuilders are gaining greater visibility, through being incorporated into popular media discourse and promoted by trade organisations, housing practitioners and commentators.

Alongside self-build, such discussions have included co-housing and community-led development. Whether such increased visibility will be met by increased uptake remains to be seen. Importantly, these forms of self-provision are not a panacea for the housing crisis; they just point to other ways of approaching the provision of housing beyond the mainstream. As part of a housing and land economy that is tipped in favour

of the market, rather than challenging the structure of these economies, they most often offer alternatives within as opposed to outside the market. This view sits uneasily alongside imaginings of such housing provision as offering a radical alternative to the market (Hardy and Ward, 1984; see also Heslop, this volume), as is demonstrated by the inclusion of community-led self-build, community land trusts (CLTs) and co-operative housing as 'alternatives to fight for' in *Staying Put: An Anti-Gentrification Handbook for Council Estates in London* (London Tenants Federation et al., 2014).

Self-Build Homes is written against the background of a renewed focus from policy managers and practitioners on self-build as a means of producing homes that are more stylised, affordable and appropriate for the specific needs of households. Suffering from neglect in scholarship and within government and policy circles (Harris, 1999), the key texts on self-build – Duncan and Rowe's 'Self-provided housing' (1993), Hardy and Ward's *Arcadia for All* (1984), and Barlow et al.'s *Homes to DIY For* (2001) – urgently need updating to reflect changes in housing policy and practice, housing provision and inequality. At present, literature has been largely restricted to practical guides for prospective builders and discrete academic papers examining specific models of development, documenting the abstracted social values that relate to them. While there are several recent initiatives that document European models of self-build housing (see, for example, the Right to Build Toolkit, http://righttobuildtoolkit.org.uk/case-studies/), collective custom build (Brown et al., 2013) and the changing state of the UK self-build market (Wallace et al., 2013), these tend towards description, advocacy and discussions of how to scale up self-build as a housing practice. Importantly, such renewed promotion of self-build in the United Kingdom has yet to be measured in terms of whether it will increase demand.

However, new academic research on these alternative forms of housing procurement are emerging in the wake of such renewed interest. This volume draws together this cutting-edge academic research on self-build, alongside commentary from leading figures in the self-procurement and wider housing sector, to offer new directions for understanding the rationales and meaning, values and imaginaries, and the concepts of community and identity, as experienced through such housing practices.

Self-build in an international context

While in the Global South, self-build goes hand-in-hand with informal settlement – a creative response of households and communities that

provides low-cost solutions to those in need when states and governments do not have the resources or inclination to provide shelter for the most disadvantaged (Hall, 1989) – in Western Europe and other advanced capitalist economies, it occupies a very different position. In these economies, self-build as a low-cost solution accessible to the most disadvantaged has been systematically undermined by land reform, the introduction of land use and planning regulation, bureaucracy and legislation (Hardy and Ward, 1984; Hall, 1989). Rather than existing outside the market and housing economy as we see in other parts of the world, in such economies it operates in uneasy tension with the housing market. The motivations of most self-builders in such economies reveal this in full; they are framed not so much in terms of shelter but of the desire for (a) a choice that the market does not otherwise offer and (b) lower cost relative to the prices of the mainstream market (Clapham et al., 1993; Barlow et al., 2001; Wallace et al., 2013). The structure of wider housing and land economies is therefore important to understanding the constitution and uptake of self-build in any given location.

Many countries have experienced growth in speculative volume housebuilding in recent decades. The United Kingdom's progressive shift away from self-build from the 1920s is perhaps the most extreme example of housing market restructuring. Today, self-build represents barely 10 per cent of aggregate housing production across the UK,[1] in stark contrast to most other West European economies. In Germany, for example, over 60 per cent of homes are commissioned by individual households and built by local companies (Lloyd et al., 2015; Duncan and Rowe, 1993). A similar pattern is found in Austria and Switzerland, while self-build in the Netherlands consistently represents around 20 per cent of overall housing production.

In the United Kindgom, self-build housing played a significant role in new housing development following the end of World War II (Hardy and Ward, 1984; Harris, 1999). Hardy and Ward's account of the plotlanders – a text that remains the most politically astute and comprehensive account of the history of self-build in Britain – documents how self-build was once a primary route into home ownership for working-class households, sweat equity substituting for economic capital (see also Ward, 2002). As Hardy and Ward (1984) documented, changes in the political landscape of housing – specifically the alliance of speculative builders and public bureaucrats who introduced planning and conservation legislation – resulted in significant obstacles to housing provision through self-provided housing. This is reflective of the increasing intervention of the state in land and property development – rather than

bottom-up development – that was detrimental to the poor and the working class (Hall, 1989). Positioned outside the mainstream housing system, it is perhaps unsurprising that the legacy of this mode of housing development has been repeatedly neglected, understudied by housing scholars, and its contribution undervalued by government (Duncan and Rowe, 1993; Clapham et al., 1993; Barlow et al., 2001). As the responsibility for housing development has been increasingly passed over to a small number of national housebuilders, the 'long tail' of individuals and small groups who provide their own homes through the purchase of land and the development of homes has been forgotten despite the potential they offer for re-visioning the housing economy (Parvin et al., 2011).

As we recounted above, there has been a revival of interest in the prospect of alternative forms of housing – self-build, custom build, and co-housing – providing a correction to the problems exacerbated by the housing crisis.

As a first step towards moving the sector forwards, policy managers, practitioners and others working in the field began to benchmark the United Kingdom's self-build sector against its near neighbours within Europe and comparable housing markets further afield. The exercise has found the United Kingdom's self-build sector generally to be both significantly smaller and narrower than many in terms of the well-rooted diversity of models, practices and production modes (Hamiduddin and Gallent, 2016). By 'well-rooted diversity' we mean that whilst there has been a myriad of pilot schemes and one-off projects in recent decades trialling a range of different approaches to appeal to a wider demographic, the stark reality is that this sector in the United Kingdom remains overwhelmingly dominated by individual household schemes, brought forward by wealthier retirees or those nearing retirement (Duncan and Rowe, 1993; Wallace et al., 2013; Benson, 2014). By contrast, self-build in most other West European countries appears to be predominantly a younger person's activity, centring on the desire to create a family home. As Duncan and Rowe explain, 'Individual attributes of income, time availability and confidence will largely explain the social distribution of self-provision … it is the wider structural factors that explain its prevalence in any one country' (1993, 1342).

Self-build in the structure of housing economies

Distinct national cultures of housing might provide one explanation for this contrast; namely, few European societies place such

importance on home ownership as in the United Kingdom, where progress up a 'property ladder' – from starter home and through several rounds of family home – is regarded as equally salient as career progression as a mark of esteem and self-realisation (Saunders, 1990). However, these cultures of housing are not self-sustaining; rather they are supported and made possible by housing and land economies that facilitate such housing trajectories. For example, in West European economies, where it is more common for households to step up from rental in early life to the purchase or commissioning of a family home, the housing economy is structured with carefully matched infrastructures – e.g. financial products, planning regulations, land provision – to support this.

Inspired by Munro and Smith (2008), our understanding of the housing economy moves beyond a view of the housing economy as a set of economic 'facts', to considering its structure as inherently social rather than 'natural' and self-perpetuating (see also Miller 1998, 2002; Christie et al., 2008), performed by key players within it (Wallace, 2008). Competing markets within housing provision thus vie for a position within this economy. Understanding how these stakeholders are variously positioned allows for consideration of the ways in which markets are arranged and socially structured (Bourdieu, 2005; Lovell and Smith, 2010). The interests of stakeholders within the market can therefore influence its shape, with housebuilders and property developers perhaps exerting pressure on governments to further their own economic ends. As Smith (2008) argues, while recognition of the ways in which governments support the construction industry through the housing market is important, this should not be to the exclusion of considering the agency of households. Self-build provides one site where this agency might be writ large.

Nevertheless, an analysis focusing on the social structures of the housing economy (Bourdieu, 2005) provides an explanatory framework for how some areas of housing procurement are excluded from mainstream markets, turning on the question of whose interests are being supported. Another dimension of this can be seen when we consider that the state also seems to play a stronger supporting role in European countries, with high levels of self-build, both passively through transparent and supportive land use zoning ordinances and actively through the provision of land and essential infrastructure or the backing of financial products to help marginal or specialist groups advance their self-build project. In Germany, for example, active municipal support has been identified as a key factor behind the recent rise of collaborative models

of self-build in cities across the country (Hamiduddin and Gallent, 2016; see also Stevens, this volume).

The highly differentiated reality of housing markets and housing cultures internationally seems to pose significant challenges for learning between contexts. This means that it may be overly simplistic to assume that models of group self-build could be deconstructed from the German cultural and housing market context and applied to representative cities in the United Kingdom. Yet, stepping back allows us to consider, firstly, whether proximate societies really are so fundamentally different and, secondly, specifically in relation to the United Kingdom, whether we really have the sort of housing market and opportunity for self-build – in its full range of guises – that we would wish for.

Until the late nineteenth century, the United Kingdom shared flourishing self-build and mutual housing sectors with its European neighbours, but it began to disappear in the wake of government support for speculative housebuilding from the 1920s onwards. It is only recently that the housing crisis has begun to reveal the extent to which this speculative market structure serves the vested interests of the few while failing the needs of the many.

In response, recent UK governments have recognised both the gravity of the housing crisis and the potential role for self-build to increase diversity and balance in the housing market. Since 2013, there have been at least three parliamentary reports on self-build in England; the establishment of an All-Party Parliamentary Group on self- and custom build; the inclusion of the need to measure demand for self-build in the National Planning Policy Framework and subsequent development of local (council) registers for potential self-builders; the provision of loans to support the development of 'custom build' and engage communities in the 'right to build'; and the introduction of exemptions for self-builders such as those announced in relation to the recently introduced Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). It is precisely as a result of government lobbying that such changes have been brought about.

Alongside these policy and governance changes, new providers have emerged; the burgeoning custom build sector – small-scale property developers offering products ranging from serviced plots to fully turnkey solutions – being a case in point. Knowingly or not, these changes echo the suggestions made by Brown (2008) on the need for the development of a professional self-build industry and for greater involvement of householders in the design of their homes. In this way, some of the risks for householders are mitigated and challenges to accessing self-build housing are overcome through the custom build developer as intermediary.

State assistance in earlier developments – for example, the Walter Segal self-build schemes supported and developed in Lewisham, London, in the 1970s and 1980s – has been replaced by alliances of local authorities, housing associations and other registered providers. While these alliances support various modes of housing development, leading to purchase, private or social rent through more community-based initiatives, their uptake, success and outcomes need to be further documented.

While self-build is frequently pitched as a solution to the housing crisis – and the rising inequality this entails – we reiterate Duncan and Rowe's (1993) emphasis that self-build may, at best, contribute to reducing housing disadvantage indirectly. Rather than a panacea, if significantly scaled up, it might slow the wider market, taking some households out of the mainstream market and thereby reducing demand relative to supply. In re-positioning self-build within the wider structures of the housing economy, we recognise that the obstacles to scaling up self-build are symptomatic of problems faced throughout the housebuilding industry in the United Kingdom. For example, lack of availability of land – the consequence of an idiosyncratic land economy where land is in private ownership – is a challenge faced by national housebuilders, local councils and self-builders alike; further, they vie for this land in a field that also contains corporate, industrial and retail development. Any efforts to scale up new housing provision in the United Kingdom – self-build or otherwise – rely on the availability of and access to land. This is not to excuse housebuilders from accusations of land banking, but rather to demonstrate shared struggles within the field of new housing provision, extending the conversation beyond the silo of the discrete market interests touted by many stakeholders, practitioners and advocates within the burgeoning self-build industry.

The market is writ large in the current encouragement of self-build, at once a solution to the problem and yet fundamentally shaped by the market (see also Benson, 2014). This is perhaps unsurprising given the extent to which housing and land are market economies in the United Kingdom. Within this framing, alternative housing is limited in terms of the opportunities it offers beyond the market. Instead, it is more likely to provide different ways of engaging with the market rather than operating beyond it. Although the inclusion of other modes of alternative housing provide some evidence of resistance to the marketisation at play in these economies (see, for example, Forde, this volume; Heslop, this volume), the prevailing structures persist, as evidenced by the limited uptake, overwhelming obstacles, and the sheer amount of energy required to complete these schemes. In the absence of route maps guiding these

alternative forms of development, the models are those of 'making it up as you go along', with each step a significant achievement and completion often many years down the line. We therefore advocate caution in thinking about the potential of self-build to provide solutions for the market, and question instead how we might go about deconstructing the structures and strictures of the market and the role of self-build within it.

Putting the social into self-build

Through their focus on community, dwelling, home and identity, the contributions to this volume explore the various meanings attributed to these forms of housing, building on rich traditions of research and theory on housing and planning, alongside conceptual work on these themes drawn from across the social sciences. In this way, the book makes key interventions into conversations about alternative housing procurement, updating the literature both in respect to the contemporary conditions of the housing economy, governance and policy, and considers how these interventions can advance theory, practice and research. It includes empirical research with both individual households and group projects, and seeks to develop a new definition of self-build that reflects this diversity of practices and encourages critical dialogue between academics and practitioners. Similarly, the academic research reported here is drawn from a range of disciplines – including sociology, planning, geography, social anthropology, housing studies and architecture – and builds on wider literature relating to housing, planning and urban studies. By drawing out a series of themes that are prevalent in wider and established bodies of research, the collection seeks to demonstrate that self-build housing has wider relevance to contemporary discussions ongoing in these areas.

The book takes as its starting point the multiplicity of rationales, discourses and meanings surrounding contemporary self-build in relation to different development models. In the opening chapter, Iqbal Hamiduddin turns to larger scale self-build communities and developments in a bid to account for the resurgence of larger schemes across Europe in recent decades. The connection between self-build and place identity forms a focal point of the chapter, particularly the integration of collective self-build with employment and community spaces that form authentic 'new pieces of the city' (Feldtkeller, 2015, 16) – a counterpoint to the discrete housing developments, disconnected from broader physical, cultural and historical contexts, that became normalised with the

development of suburbia in the late nineteenth century (Hall, 2013). Martin Field, in his chapter, attempts to unravel the multitude of drivers underpinning a revival of mutual models of self-build, which include a range of forms and scales from small co-operatives to mutual neighbourhoods. In the final contribution to the opening section, Jenny Pickerill makes the powerful case for eco-building as a form of self-build development that offers both affordable and sustainable living. As she documents, while there is a celebration of the technological solutions offered by such homes, this overlooks the significant socio-cultural framings of the relationship between housing and environment, people, politics and place that are crucial to its realisation. It is only through shifting focus towards these dimensions that a better understanding of how to encourage uptake might be achieved.

In turning attention towards lived experience, the second part of the volume explores how values, lifestyles and imaginaries interplay with and in the production of self-build homes. It includes a travelogue of case studies to emphasise the different social processes and outcomes related to self-build models in a range of contexts. Picking up the baton for low-impact living, Elaine Forde calls for a reconsideration of self-build located within the broader context of provisioning. This marries well with the communitarianism that is an integral feature of Y Mynydd, an off-grid eco-village in West Wales. Her account thus provides a useful counterpoint to traditional production and consumption discourses that continue to prevail in housing studies. While Forde's chapter challenges us to think about what ideas of living underpin normative understandings of housing, Julia Heslop's account of an innovative participatory housing project questions the functioning of power in housing in austerity Britain. Focused on the co-production of a Segal home with homeless people, and the social processes that surround this, she reiterates the call for a socialised understanding of housing; it is only in this way that housing can become a site for empowerment and in which people may invest value. Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia and Kathleen Scanlon then provide a unique insight into the formation of a co-housing group, through a detailed case study of a project for older people in south London. Their account provides clues as to why the collaborative self-build sector – and co-housing in particular – has struggled to gain momentum in the United Kingdom despite an apparently strong appetite for it.

The third section of the volume focuses on how self-building articulates with community and identity. In the opening chapter of the section, Michaela Benson offers new insights into individual self-build projects. Through a focus on the emotional trajectories of two self-build projects,

she argues for a shift from an understanding of self-build as housebuilding to one that recognises its location in ongoing processes of homemaking. In this way, she reminds us that the building of houses is not the same as the work required for the making of homes. Shifting to the relationship between community and identity, Jim Hudson's chapter draws on the study of two senior co-housing groups in the United Kingdom. While growing old in a community has been heralded as a significant motivation behind such formations – an issue of increasing pertinence in light of ongoing changes to health and social care provision – he draws out how the attitudes and motivations of individual members relate to wider issues of social connection, class and belonging. Emma Heffernan and Pieter de Wilde focus on affordable group self-build projects in the United Kingdom. They tease out the experiences of these self-builders, revealing how community is central to their imaginings of life following building. While it is clear how this might be facilitated by working closely with others on the building process, they also explain how it stretches beyond the building site, with their new neighbours being equally committed to the development of affordable homes in these areas. In the final empirical chapter of the third section, Katherine Collins powerfully explores how a community self-build project working with homeless ex-services personnel feeds into the reconstruction of identity. Produced through arts-based research, the rich semi-fictionalised narratives she presents in the chapter draw out the complex and varied biographies and experiences of those participating in the project, revealing the challenges and hardships of re-integrating into civilian life.

The final section of the book brings the conversation back to three leading practitioners (Feldtkeller, Hill and Stevens). It draws on their deep experience to consider the new directions for self-build internationally, and to reflect on the steps that need to be taken to develop three aspects of the field. We travel to Tübingen's celebrated French Quarter, with Andreas Feldtkeller, the mastermind of this project, to consider how self-build can be combined with a mixed land use strategy to create authentic new urban quarters, setting out the steps that are necessary to return to these elemental and essential tools of city making and the urban commons. The second contribution draws on recent research from across Europe, conducted with a view to developing the sector in the United Kingdom. Here, Ted Stevens sets out a road map for the further development of practice and policy that he helped to instigate as chair of the National Custom and Self Build Association (NaCSBA). The third of these practitioner perspectives focuses on the intertwining of the political and social in community-led housing, as Stephen Hill – a veteran of

the sector – showcases new models of community organisation that may support and lead a fast-growing sector of the self-build market.

We close the volume with a conclusion that thinks through what recognising the social in self-build offers in terms of new directions for research and practice.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued that self-build ought to be extracted from the strictures of construction modes and methods, and instead placed within a more expansive social envelope, where development processes can more clearly be seen to serve greater ends of place shaping, the expression of relationships between self and others, and self or collective fulfilment. We have also noted the radically different housing market conditions and cultural contexts in which self-build is undertaken internationally, recognising that many of the countries where self-build is a social norm have not needed the same level of discussion around the topic as is currently taking place in the United Kingdom. Ultimately, however, social challenges relevant to self-build pervade all parts of the globe – from acute housing demand across cities of the Global South to demographic change and ageing across societies of the Global North. Urban development has always entailed a sharing and swapping of ideas between different geographical and social contexts in 'circuits of knowledge and techniques' (Healey, 2013), and it is with this spirit that we embark on this journey of ideas, experiences and case studies, and reflect on what we might wish to pollinate between different places.

Part 1
Discourse, rationale, meaning

2

Community building: self-build and the neighbourhood commons

Iqbal Hamiduddin

This chapter focuses on the recently completed examples of self-build deployed on a larger scale to create neighbourhoods and new urban quarters (see also Feldtkeller, this volume). In countries such as Germany or Sweden, where self-build forms a major component of the housing market, large-scale developments produced through self-build may be relatively commonplace. Historically, we often forget how central the diversity of building styles and techniques achieved through assemblages of individual buildings has been in creating places that we have now come to cherish. Venice is perhaps a classic example – a city described simply as a 'work' by Lefebvre, and as 'a place built by collective will and collective thought … a great hymn to diversity in pleasure and inventiveness in celebration, revelry and sumptuous ritual' (1991, 75). The physical outcome of these collective individual acts may be described as 'common-wealth' – urbanism whose overall quality may be considered greater than the sum of its constituent elements.

But what are the social outcomes of these collective works of individual investment, and do common-pool social resources develop to echo the physical act of place production? This question forms the basis of this chapter, both through tangible evidence in the form of design and maintenance of public areas and shared public-private spaces (O'Brien, 2012), and in tangible expressions of social relations catalysed by common interest and shared experiences and upon which reciprocal trust and social capital is formed (Putnam, 2000). Following from the work of Karl Linn, these collective physical and social resources may be described as the 'neighbourhood commons' (Linn, 1969). In reflecting upon fundamental

relationships between households, homes and their wider living environment, Linn (1969, 65) observed that:

> People are alienated from their physical environment if they are unable to leave their personal imprints on their immediate surroundings. Relegating human beings to the role of passive spectators of their environment threatens their mental equilibrium, and robs them of the opportunity to assert their authority, to develop mastery over their places of habitat.

Allowing residents to establish strong bonds with their wider home environment and, potentially, with one another, through incidental social interaction, is a salient policy aspiration given present-day concerns over social isolation and societal polarisation (see also Hudson, this volume). The idea of the neighbourhood commons centred on 'a block plaza, a meeting place for young and old … [which] would also create an opportunity for the unengaged youth and the rest of the community to become proud builders of the neighbourhood' (Linn, 1969, 65) – holds that the qualities of physical space can be a means of producing desirable social outcomes. Unlike developer-built neighbourhoods, collective self-build schemes often have a body of prospective residents with whom to engage on aspects of community design early in the development process. The input of a core group of prospective residents was critical in the shaping of Freiburg's Vauban and Bristol's Ashley Vale, as we will see later in the chapter. However, the accumulation of individual acts of home construction can contribute significantly to the overall tone and ethos of a neighbourhood, even where residents are less directly engaged in designing their neighbourhood.

This is especially the case in dense new urban quarters, where the form and relationships between buildings, streets and land uses become critical to good social and practical functionality. These aspects – which comprise four critical elements: (a) the physical qualities of the built environment; (b) access to and across the neighbourhood; (c) maintenance; and (d) the characteristics of the residents of a scheme – are explored in this chapter through four European case study self-build schemes. These schemes represent different approaches to self-build reflecting the cultural and market contexts of Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. They are also of a sufficient scale to have public spaces and facilities and, while representing a spectrum of physical scales, are all distinctive physical entities in their local context.

A key observation of this chapter is that *many collective self-build schemes become a larger canvas for the energy, place-making instincts and shared interests common to a community of self-builders.* These qualities can be viewed as a composite whole, in terms of the self-build neighbourhood acting as a physically distinctive but functionally integrated place or 'work' (Lefebvre, 1991), making an important contribution to the city and region. Alternatively, these qualities can be broken down into discrete elements that contribute different common-pool resources within the neighbourhood. While Linn's linear relationship suggests that physical qualities of the neighbourhood commons exert a shaping influence on social outcomes, I argue here that the introduction of self-build as a primary mode of development has the potential to modify this relationship into a cyclical one: community shaping space, space shaping community. This is partly because self-builders become 'builders of the neighbourhood' through the collective sum of their individual build projects, and also because self-builders exercise greater decision making over domestic outdoor spaces that contribute to the neighbourhood commons. An important aspect of this process is that many collective self-build schemes actively engage prospective households in the masterplanning of *their* future neighbourhood.

The idea of the commons

What do we mean by 'the commons'? These public goods and resources exist across society, from atmosphere and rainwater at a global level, to grazing land and urban public spaces managed by local communities. Garrett Hardin articulated a classic conundrum of all common-pool resources, where the immediate return from private exploitation can be seen to trump long-term management of the resource for all (Hardin, 1968) – a problem of 'rivalry and free-riding' (Foster, 2011, 57). Within the urban context, issues include the privatisation of (so-called) public spaces with the imposition of strict access restrictions (Brenner and Theodore, 2002), the creation of gated neighbourhoods and communities, offering security for those inside but diminishing it for those outside, and even dog-fouling of public areas (Lee and Webster, 2006). Within the residential environment, O'Brien (2012) defines the commons in terms of shared spaces outside of the private enclosed space where 'an individual's behaviours become part of the daily lives of the others living there' (O'Brien, 2012, 468) and include 'fronts, along with yards and porches … the backdrop against which public interaction occurs'. Within

the neighbourhood, the commons may be seen to encompass both spaces within the curtilage of private ownership and more definitely public side-walks, set-backs, hard standings and green spaces with the implication that 'maintenance of traditionally private spaces is also relevant to the community as a whole' (O'Brien, 2012, 468).

Hardin notes that the commons cannot exist indefinitely without maintenance. Without effective self or external governance, over-use of the commons – rural or urban – for private gain will degrade it for all. However, close-knit communities tend to possess a self-regulating quality, or *collective efficacy*, that is brought to bear upon behaviour that falls short of the social norm. Indeed, O'Brien reflects on the fact that:

> Neighborhoods with a strong sense of community are character-ized by established social norms, and neighbors who are comfort-able enforcing them when necessary … All evidence suggests that informal governance is a human universal, though the exact mech-anisms by which it functions, and the behaviors it seeks to motivate, vary between cultures. (2012, 470)

Weaker communities are likely to be more blighted by antisocial behav-iour and over-exploitation of the commons is likely to be an indicator of either societal weakness or 'regulatory slippage' (Foster, 2011, 57).

Self-build and the commons

In this chapter, I explore the contribution of collective self-build schemes with respect to the development of four interlinked common-pool resources that self-reinforce in a cyclical fashion (see Figure 2.1).
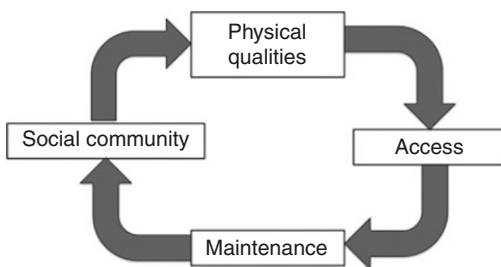
Figure 2.1   Four interlinked common-pool resources

Fundamentally important is the community of self-builders them-selves and the individual and collective decisions made about the physical environment – itself a reflection of the social qualities of the residential community. Using Freiburg's Vauban and Tubingen's Loretto and French Quarters (see also Feldtkeller, this volume), we will see how the bearing that these individual and collective decisions have on the physical qualities of the built environment – from 'macro' masterplanning aspects such as the relationship between buildings and the streets or the characteristics of street and public spaces, to 'micro' aspects of detail such as how the territorial borders between properties – are defined. Next, these physical qualities have an important influence on access – both in terms of objective physical access to shared spaces including streets, sidewalks and other public spaces among different social groups, and some of the more subjective perceptions of access influenced by feelings of safety and well-being that can have an important bearing on the use of these common spaces by different users. Lastly, the issue of maintenance of shared spaces and subjective or objective influences over perceptions of access forms an essential issue of the commons, because it is possible for individuals or particular groups to control access and appropriate the commons for their own ends. Such denial of space may occur surreptitiously through social signals. David Harvey (1997, 3) notes that 'community has ever been one of the key sites of social control and surveillance, bordering on overt social repression. Well-founded communities often exclude, define themselves against others, erect all sorts of keep-out signs.' Indeed, it will be noted that neighbourhoods can become the subject of residential self-selection processes, enclosing the commons in a subtle form (Lee and Webster, 2006). This feeds back into the characteristics and social qualities of the residential communities and, in turn, into the physical qualities of space, which may be modified over time with a resulting influence on access and ultimately maintenance.

Self-build communities

The self-build community idea has recently seen an upsurge in the UK, through the revival of the idea of community build, either as communities of individual household builders, such as at Ashley Vale in Bristol, or as collaborative mutual build schemes in Lewisham, London. These established approaches have been supplemented by newer approaches to collaborative development and shared living, as illustrated by the growing number of co-housing schemes completed or underway across the

country. This revived enthusiasm for larger self-build developments has been embraced by government centrally – through policy support backed by seedcorn funds and a limited amount of public land – and locally – through planning and, in the case of Cherwell District Council, direct support for the creation of self-build neighbourhoods through a range of different development models (see also Stevens, this volume; cf. Field, this volume).

The following sections bring together an assortment of primary data sets collected in the four case study sites of (a) Vauban in Freiburg, Germany; (b) Tübingen's Loretto and French Quarters, also in Germany; (c) Nieuw Leiden in the Dutch city of Leiden; and (d) Bristol's Ashley Vale community in southwest England. The data consists of municipal demographic data together with interviews, household questionnaire surveys and site visits conducted by the author between 2010 and 2016. Some of the primary data has been reported elsewhere (e.g. Hamiduddin and Gallent, 2016; Hamiduddin, 2015; Hamiduddin and Daseking, 2014). Key characteristics of the four case studies are set out in Table 2.1 and are then introduced in turn. It should be noted that the 'sweat equity' input of householders into the construction of their homes varies considerably between and within each scheme. Nieuw Leiden has probably the lowest overall level because of its high proportion of public housing – the tenants were limited to the customisation of the internal layout of their homes. The *Baugruppen* schemes of Tübingen and Freiburg were individually designed, with residents engaging in the design and management process and, in some cases, the internal finish of their homes. Lastly, the Ashley Vale scheme had probably the greatest proportion of owner completion, being largely comprised of single-family home dwellings, several of which were entirely constructed or commissioned by their owners.

Nieuw Leyden (Leiden, Netherlands)

Fully completed in 2013, this 670-home scheme is located centrally within the historic Dutch city of Leiden, on the site of a former livestock market and abattoir. The housing has been constructed in row form and with two different models based on tenure. The privately owned housing located on the east and west areas of the site is entirely custom- or self-build, while the public rental housing forming the core area of the site allowed the first wave of tenants to customise the layout of their home around a number of options set by the housing corporation, with the help of software provided. Because of these different tenure-based approaches, the

Table 2.1 Four case studies summarised

	Loretto + French Quarters, Tübingen	*Vauban, Freiburg*	*Nieuw Leiden, Leyden*	*Ashley Vale, Bristol*
Scale	2,500 + 400 homes	2,200 homes	670 homes	41 homes
Completed	2002	2005	2013	2011
Development modes	90 per cent group self-build + 10 per cent co-operatives	25 per cent group self-build; remainder a mix of co-operatives and individual self-build	25 per cent individual self-build + 75 per cent resident-adapted public housing	60 per cent (26) individual self-build homes + 40 per cent (15) group build in a converted office building
Land supply	Municipality procured the entire site and sold serviced plots to groups at a fixed (m²) price.	Municipality procured the entire site and sold serviced plots to groups at a fixed (m²) price.	Land privately purchased by a resident-formed company. Plots bought individually by households.	Municipality procured the entire site. Serviced plots sold for private house development.
Finance	Private finance arranged by each household. Generous terms available from a state-supported bank.	Private finance arranged by each household. Generous terms available from a state-supported bank.	Private finance arranged by each household.	Private finance arranged by each household.
Physical attributes	Shared street spaces; low car neighbourhood design; soft boundaries between homes; generous and accessible green spaces.	Shared street spaces; low car neighbourhood design; soft boundaries between homes; generous and accessible green spaces.	Shared street spaces; communal green space.	Shared street spaces; low car neighbourhood design; green spaces; resident-designed and maintained street-scaping.

private self-build homes show an obvious outward diversity of building styles, while diversity in the public housing stock is limited to internal layouts and external detailing only. Both private and public housing back onto communal garages, with vehicle access from the outer side of the site, allowing all residential streets to be closed to vehicle traffic. This has created a socially amenable residential environment, illustrated by widespread communal planting and the use of streets as recreational space. Homes and street spaces across the different tenures are evidently well-maintained by residents and there was virtually no evidence of littering or graffiti. The private row-housing demonstrates the production of a highly diverse street environment as a collective product of individual self-build housing projects.

Loretto and the French Quarter (Tübingen, Germany)

The Südstadt, which is nearing completion, will form a corridor of approximately 2,000 homes on the city's southern fringe along the Stuttgarter Straβe, approximately 1.5 km from Tübingen city centre. The scheme is formed around two distinctive quarters: Loretto Platz on the western side, closest to the city centre, and the French Quarter, which forms a large easterly suburb connected to Loretto by a narrow seam of new housing. The project was overseen by Andreas Feldtkeller, the former head of planning until 1998, who sought to create a genuine mixed-use new district, emphasising small industries and the full range of local amenities that has sought to make the 'city of short distances' philosophy a practical reality (see also Feldtkeller, this volume). Private open space has been deliberately minimised, with a small curtilage of just one or two metres surrounding each building, and instead an emphasis has been placed on communal 'ownership' of the spaces between buildings. Boundaries between public and private space tend to be 'soft' and demarcated by landscaping rather than by hard barriers (see Figure 2.6). The masterplan for the scheme was created competitively, to create a loose overall design code and a traffic concept, whilst the detail of building design was left open to each individual or *Baugruppe* building consortium.

At Loretto and the French Quarter, each plot has been designed and developed individually for a group of households that formed into a development consortium or *Baugruppe*. This group self-build model is sometimes likened to a co-operative or co-housing, though often entirely privately funded by the residents themselves and often conceived without the deeper communitarian ethos integral to the co-housing model

(Hamiduddin and Gallent, 2016). Design coding has been limited deliberately to cover just the fundamental aspects of building design layout and design, such as building heights, footprints and sightlines, enabling the creation of Intelligent Trial and Error urbanism (Dotson, 2016), permitting a more 'organic' mode of development under simplified planning arrangements. Under these arrangements, *Baugruppen* were given freedom over detailed aspects of design, including architectural style, facing materials, the arrangement of balconies and windows, and micro-energy production.

Vauban (Freiburg, Germany)

Now well-established as a model for sustainable neighbourhood planning, construction on Vauban began in the late 1990s and continues to the present day, although the bulk of the 2,200 homes were completed by 2010. The suburb is located towards the southern edge of the city approximately 3.5 km from the city centre on the site of a former military barracks, which became home to a group of environmental campaigners following the withdrawal of French troops in the early 1990s. Environmental concern has been central to the scheme's evolution. The early campaign group formed a subsequent 'Forum Vauban' community group, which entered into dialogue with the municipal authority for the purpose of shaping development plans. The Forum's original concept was for a low-energy, car-free scheme – a concept that has been delivered in the core area of the suburb, where only temporary vehicle access is permitted and residents' car parking is available on one of two edge-of-development sites.

Ashley Vale (Bristol, United Kingdom)

This 41-home development of individual and group self-build homes is the outcome of over a decade of community activism, project management and fundraising by the Ashley Vale Action Group. The group was formed in 2000 by local residents of St Werburghs who opposed proposals for a new housing development on a 2.1-hectare former industrial site. From an opposition stance, the group began to develop its own ideas for housing on the site for local residents and it purchased the site the following year. The original plan included housing association homes, but the organisation folded during construction in 2005, meaning that the group was forced to step in and complete the construction of six self-finish bungalows. The remainder of the individual self-build homes are

now virtually finished. Most have employed a lightweight timber frame design approach, and have been completed to very high environmental sustainability standards.

The following sections explore the four interlinked common-pool resources associated with collective self-build schemes as set out earlier in Figure 2.1, and are reflections drawn from a number of separate studies and site visits investigating larger scale self-build schemes. The data has been drawn together from documentary analysis, observations conducted during site visits, primary data collected from household surveys as reported in Hamiduddin (2013) and Hamiduddin and Daseking (2014), as well as interviews with residents, planners and other key actors connected with the development of the Vauban and French Quarter schemes, as set out in Hamiduddin and Gallent (2016). Building on a research framework established by Hamiduddin (2013), this chapter is organised around the following research questions:

- Who lives in self-build schemes and how do social relations compare to other neighbourhoods?
- To what extent do self-build communities differently shape the physical qualities of their neighbourhood environment?
- Who are these self-build neighbourhoods and street spaces accessible to, both for long-term dwelling and day-to-day inclusion as a functioning part of the wider city?
- Are self-build neighbourhoods better maintained than others?

The social community

The characteristics and qualities of a resident community can be viewed both as the start and the end point of the neighbourhood commons discussion. A community's collective desires, outlook and decisions will have a fundamental bearing on the production of the physical and social environment, while its composition and dynamics will in turn be influenced by the physical and social environment. Taking community as a starting point, several studies have indicated that self-build is likely to be self-selective. In the United Kingdom, where individual self-build tends to dominate, the sector is overwhelmingly represented by older households able to draw on equity accumulated over a long housing career (see also Benson and Hamiduddin, this volume; Hudson, this volume). By contrast, in Germany, where self-build is much more widespread as a development mode, the demographic is significantly younger because of

a housing culture that will typically see a household purchase (or build) one (if any) home in a lifetime to house a growing family. For this reason, *Baugruppen* schemes tend to be very well represented by younger households, typically with young children. Additionally, as these schemes are delivered by the private sector, they rely on access to private finance and can therefore exclude those unable to access the requisite project funds (Droste, 2015). Existing social networks can also play a critical role in the formation of a self-build community.

In a study of three *Baugruppen* schemes, Hamiduddin and Gallent (2016) found that groups often emerged out of existing social networks and were strongly associated with social objectives, such as the desire to live near friends or relations, or the ability to choose one's neighbours, for example. The Ashley Vale Action Group was initially formed from a network of local residents who spotted a development opportunity on a nearby disused site and began distributing leaflets and holding doorstep conversations in the neighbourhood. On the other hand, some communities may be formed by a development professional, such as an architect or project manager, and may initially attract prospective self-builders for whom individual practical considerations such as cost-savings and building style may be a greater consideration at the outset (see also Feldtkeller, this volume).

Although motivations and community formation processes may differ at the outset, the collective development process is an intensely shared experience such that the *Baugruppen* will usually see the social element of this approach come to the fore at an early stage, binding individuals together in a collective venture, or occasionally causing groups – or individuals within them – to break away if fundamental desires cannot be reconciled or the process proves too intense (cf. Fernández Arrigoitia and Scanlon, this volume). Some groups may also be excluded from joining collective self-build communities such as *Baugruppen*. Evidence from Freiburg suggests that low-income or financially vulnerable groups, as well as older home-seekers, may be significantly less likely to be able to access these schemes (Hamiduddin and Gallent, 2016). The barriers identified vary between groups and have cultural inflections.

Figure 2.2 presents the age profiles of residents of Vauban compared to mean values for the city. It shows that the greatest differences in age structure occur at the extremes. Vauban has nearly double the city's average proportions of under 18-year-olds, but significantly fewer older people with only 2.1 per cent of Vauban's population in the over 65 bracket, compared with the city average of 16.9 per cent. Vauban also has
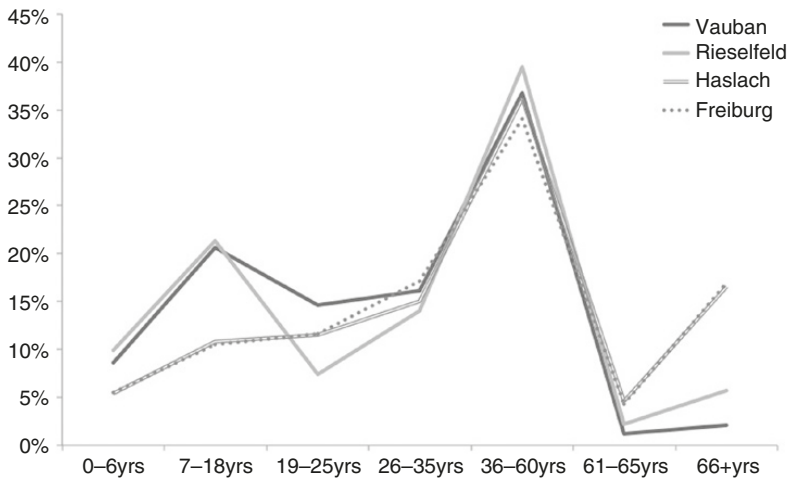
Figure 2.2 Age profiles of three neighbourhoods in Freiburg
(Hamiduddin, 2015)

a slightly higher than average proportion of its population in the 35–60
age bracket. In other words, Vauban is typified by households of middle-
aged adults with children, but has markedly fewer older residents.

Can the nature of social relations between residents within the
three neighbourhoods be attributed to the different ways in which these
areas have been produced? Hamiduddin and Daseking (2014) report
data from a comparison of social relations between three neighbour-
hoods in Freiburg: (a) Vauban, where approximately one quarter of the
housing stock has been delivered through *Baugruppen*, (b) Rieselfeld,
where *Baugruppen* represent approximately 10 per cent of housing, and
(c) Haslach, the control neighbourhood containing no *Baugruppen*, but
where the demographic profile of residents matches the overall averages
for the city in most respects (see Figure 2.2). Community development is
considered at three different levels: along streets, across each develop-
ment, and in terms of how residents in each location judge their neigh-
bourhood's level of integration into the wider city. Residents were asked
how many people they knew by name on their street. The results, dis-
played in Table 2.2, show a striking pattern: Vauban residents know, on
average, three times as many of their neighbours as do the residents of
Haslach, with Rieselfeld residents lying approximately halfway between
the two.

In the questionnaire, residents were asked how often they greet a
neighbour. The results, displayed in Figure 2.3, appear to support the

Table 2.2 Street relations in three neighbourhoods compared

	Vauban	*Rieselfeld*	*Haslach*
Sample number *(N)*	89	88	73
Minimum	5	5	0
Maximum	1,000	300	200
Average	95	64	22
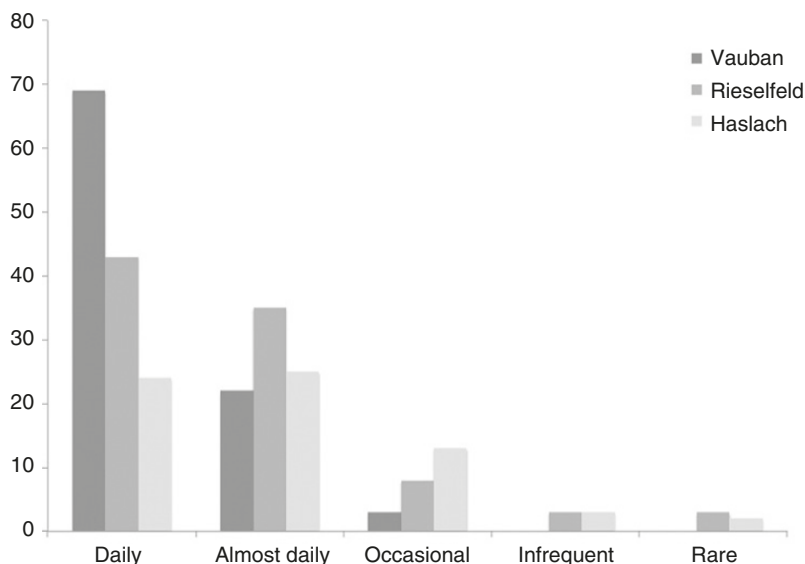
Figure 2.3   Neighbourly contact in three neighbourhoods compared

patterns of street and development friendship noted above: roughly 70 per cent of Vauban residents greeted a neighbour daily, compared with over 40 per cent of Rieselfeld residents and less than 30 per cent of Haslach residents. Three principal factors may have influenced these patterns. In the first instance, a basic sociability between neighbours must exist, and in Vauban this is likely to be affected by the group-build approach which was most prevalent in Vauban. Secondly, residential design may exert an influence on social interaction, such as through incidental contact. This relates to a third factor, which is the travel patterns of residents and particularly the likelihood of their achieving propinquity through being in the same place and at the same time.
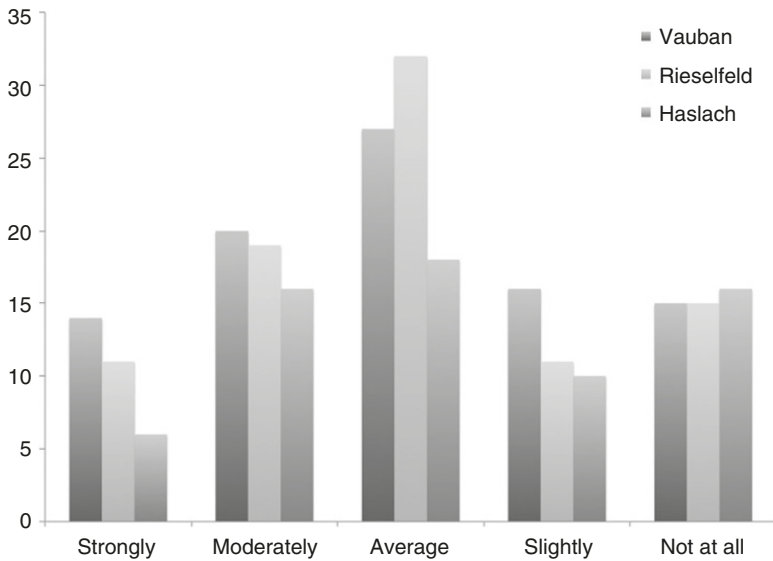
Figure 2.4   How well different social groups mix

Corresponding patterns emerge in relation to friendship development at neighbourhood level (see Table 2.2). On average, Vauban residents know nearly five times as many people in their neighbourhood as residents of Haslach. These measures are, for the most part, just estimates. The pattern may reflect substantial differences in household size, as revealed in official Freiburg City Authority data. Households in Vauban comprise, on average, 2.95 members, as many contain young children. This figure compares to 2.56 in Rieselfeld and 1.89 for Haslach. The overall Freiburg average is 1.92. If 'persons known' are converted into 'households known' using the household occupancy (size) data for each of the developments, the differences narrow somewhat to an average of 32 households for Vauban residents, 25 households at Rieselfeld, and 11.5 for Haslach residents.

Perceptions of relative community cohesion were gauged through questions about how residents thought people of different ages and backgrounds mixed; the sense of belonging to their neighbourhood; and their impression of community cohesion. The results on age and background mix from Vauban and Rieselfeld are very closely matched: about 80 per cent of residents in each stated that different age groups mixed together well or moderately well, and over 70 per cent claimed that people of different backgrounds mixed well or moderately well. In Haslach, these results were slightly less positive at 70 per cent and 57

per cent respectively, although a greater proportion of residents thought that the neighbourhood was 'average' in respect to how different age and background groups mixed.

However, results for the 'sense of belonging' that residents felt to their community diverged dramatically: 70 per cent at Vauban, 60 per cent at Rieselfeld, but just 22 per cent at Haslach. Lastly, over 80 per cent of Vauban residents thought their neighbourhood had a strong or moderate sense of community, approximately 65 per cent at Rieselfeld and just 23 per cent at Haslach, where about one third thought there was a slight or only a weak sense of community.

Indicators of community cohesion from resident questionnaire surveys are by their nature subjective, and individuals' perceptions are shaped by a range of different factors, not least experience and aspirations. However, the patterns of stronger social relations and sense of belonging that emerge from the different data sets are consistent and indicate closer community ties at Vauban and, to a lesser extent, at Rieselfeld, than at Haslach. Exploring the underlying reasons for this, Hamiduddin (2013, 2015) found that patterns of social interaction appeared to correlate to the self-build mode of housing delivery at Vauban and Rieslefeld, because a member of a *Baugruppe* scheme will automatically get to know and have contact with all other members of the scheme. As each *Baugruppe* will typically have between 12 and 20 households, each with an average of 2.5 occupants, a typical *Baugruppe* resident may know at least 30–50 close neighbours at the outset – a strong starting point, which is likely strengthened further by a low level of resident turnover. However, the data has also shows a skewing of the demographic profile of residents towards younger and more financially able households, while cultural barriers such as life stage and structural barriers including access to finance may prevent access by older households.

Physical qualities

How might a resident community shape qualities of the physical environment? Certain qualities may be the collective product of individual actions – for example, the upkeep of gardens or street space in front of homes – or, in certain cases, residents themselves may have a high degree of influence over strategic decisions on neighbourhood design or upkeep. Ashley Vale, the French Quarter and Vauban have been shaped, at the macro level, by high degrees of community input into neighbourhood design and an eclectic assemblage of building styles

Figure 2.5 'Soft boundaries' maintain a relationship between homes and streets (© Iqbal Hamiduddin)

produced by self-build under a permissive planning framework, which gives each neighbourhood a strong place quality. At the meso and micro levels, a telling characteristic of these three neighbourhoods is that they have fewer 'hard boundaries' between privately owned and communal space, as portrayed by the very small curtilage separating building fronts and the street, the absence of fences that would ordinarily separate plots and private gardens, and instead the demarcation of territories by more subtle means such as plants or very low picket fences (Figure 2.5). The overall effect of reducing the usual territorial demarcations is to create a 'flow' between private and public spaces, whereby all areas become effectively shared, and buildings engage with the street in ways that encourage interaction with street users and increase natural surveillance.

At Vauban, residents were encouraged to participate in the planning of the neighbourhood through the Forum Vauban, the descendent of the original action group that lobbied for the development. Here, as in Tübingen, residents, in collaboration with planners and architects, established an overall tone or design philosophy for *Baugruppen*, individual self-builders and developers to work to, rather than producing a detailed and prescriptive design code. Shared communal spaces feature in all four of the collective self-build case studies examined in this

research. In each case, a communitarian ethos prevails in the broader aspects of residential layout and planning, including street design and the notable use of shared road spaces or *woonerven* (living streets, as in Ashley Vale), sometimes in combination with partial traffic access restrictions (Vauban, French Quarter/Loretto) or entirely traffic-free streets (Nieuw Leiden). At Vauban, a by-law enacted to permit the circumvention of federal legislation has allowed car parking to be consolidated in multi-storey garages on the edge of the development, which has the dual effect of reducing through-traffic in the neighbourhood and creating additional public areas by reclaiming some of the space originally allocated for car parking. At Nieuw Leiden, communal car parking has rather ingeniously been allocated in the space between terraces of row houses, with rear gardens placed on the garages and vehicle access provided by lateral roads running along the northern and southern edges of the development. Shared surfaces and traffic reduction measures tend to produce socially amenable space, both because a street with little traffic produces a quality of environment conducive to socialising (Appleyard et al., 1981) and because non-motorised uses of street space – playing, walking and cycling – are given legal priority in home zone ordinances. Vehicle reduction can lead to the domestication of street space in front of homes, as expressed in maintenance and upkeep of that area through the removal of leaves or snow, for example. In Nieuw Leiden, residents have collectively domesticated residential street space permanently through landscaping schemes financed by the municipal authority, over which they have joint responsibility for upkeep and maintenance.

Access

Which people are these self-build neighbourhoods and street spaces accessible to, both for long-term dwelling or day-to-day inclusion as a functioning part of the wider city? As Hodkinson (2012) notes, new processes of enclosure have emerged under neoliberalism. The hard barriers to access erected through earlier Acts of Enclosure of the commons have been supplanted by 'softer' and more subtle processes of privatisation, gentrification, territorial development and surveillance (Brenner and Theodore, 2002) that achieve the same purpose of diminishing freedom of access and the integration of different parts of the city. Turning to long-term residence, which is characteristic of most larger self-build schemes, the resale value of properties rapidly rises above that of equivalent dwellings in other

parts of the city. This phenomenon appears to be caused by desirable qualities in a building, the broader neighbourhood environment, and relative scarcity compared to latent demand. Indeed, in some German cities including Freiburg and Berlin, *Baugruppen* have been linked with gentrification processes (Droste, 2015). The 'double win' of higher affordability and higher value uplift experienced by many first wave *Baugruppen* residents has led some municipalities to invoke minimum stay of occupancy clauses in a bid to prevent speculation and a rapid turnover of residents during the initial years of a scheme. However, in the long term, the characteristics of a resident community may begin to move away from an eclectic mix in the pioneering first wave – many of whom may have otherwise struggled to get onto the housing market at all (Hamiduddin and Gallent, 2016) – to a more comfortable middle-class community. High uplift leading to diminished affordability characterises all sectors of self-build and, in the case of collective self-build, can lead to neighbourhoods becoming inaccessible to lower-income groups over the longer term.

More immediate is the question of access and integration in each direction between neighbourhood community and the wider society of city and region. In none of the four case studies nor in the wider literature is there any evidence of hard barriers of fences and security gates erected around the neighbourhoods. Here, potential processes of enclosure are likely to take more subtle physical forms, such as low levels of pedestrian access from outside the development or social introversion and insularity among residents, – which are potential corollaries of strong internal community relations within a neighbourhood. Although Vauban has been described as a 'green ghetto' (Hamiduddin, 2013), this scheme and the other case studies are well connected to adjacent neighbourhoods and all are permeable for pedestrians. Research reported in Hamiduddin and Daseking (2014) also reveals a stronger sense of belonging between Vauban residents and the wider Freiburg community, compared with two nearby neighbourhoods. One potential reason for this strength of wider belonging is that 72 per cent of Rieselfeld residents and 65 per cent of Vauban residents have moved in from other parts of Freiburg (Freiburg City Authority, 2007) and retain social networks across the city. The notion that strong internal community relations may be forged at the expense of wider social connectedness does not seem to be supported in any of the four case studies; nor is there any indication of this in the wider literature.

Lastly, perceptions of safety and security can have a significant bearing on access and the use of common places, including street space – a matter investigated at Vauban in relation to children's independent

mobility within the neighbourhood. Here, higher levels of objective safety produced by stringent car reduction measures, together with high levels of trust produced by strong community relations (Figure 2.4) – a by-product of the *Baugruppen* development approach, were found to be the critical factors in generating very high levels of freedom to roam among young children compared to other neighbourhoods in the city (Hamiduddin, 2013).

The overall conclusions from the four case studies examined in this work are, firstly, in relation to the question of long-term access, there are grounds for real concern that affordability is likely to diminish appreciably over the medium to long term unless measures are introduced to guarantee access for lower income groups. However, in relation to more immediate issues of access and integration between neighbourhood and city, high levels of physical integration were found in all the case studies. At Vauban, strong perceptions of inclusion in wider urban society seemed to echo this. Furthermore, access to public spaces for all groups was found to be high in Vauban, as typified by high levels of independent mobility among young children, which reflects the objective safety created by a low traffic environment and high levels of trust fostered by the *Baugruppen* development approach.

Maintenance

Collective upkeep and maintenance is the great tragedy of the commons. The personal benefit derived by an individual user through overexploiting a common resource will usually trump the disbenefit of resource degradation experienced by all users as a result of such overexploitation. In the case of local common resources, checks and balances have often been developed to enforce fair use, through peer pressure or systems of justice to root out transgressions. For example, a poorly maintained property can generate blight or engender doubt as to the qualities of an area. Within the neighbourhood setting, the existence of effective justice and enforcement systems may help to maintain basic access to common-pool resources such as public realm and shared spaces, guarding against antisocial or prejudicial behaviour. Maintaining the *quality* of the homes, curtilages and intermediate spaces between home and public realm that contribute to the neighbourhood commons can be significantly harder to achieve. Collective efficacy can be an important force cultivated through overt and covert signalling of social norms and expectations. Yet, in keeping with Hardin's original tragedy (1968), this may only develop strongly

in neighbourhoods with a population settled enough for social relations to take root, for the sense of personal and collective responsibility to develop, and for individuals and households to privately benefit from the collective action taken. Private home ownership can be an important factor in ensuring the maintenance of the neighbourhood commons, because homeowners have a clear, present and uncomplicated self-interest in the upkeep of their homes, gardens and adjoining public spaces (O'Brien, 2012).

Larger self-build developments appear to be well maintained and kept – perhaps a reflection of the tendency for homes to be privately owned and occupied. In Tübingen's Loretto and French Quarters, public spaces appear particularly well tended by resident groups, with simple but transformative gestures such as an abundance of pot-plants in public spaces during the warmer months.

Important though it is, tenure is unlikely to be the only factor in determining upkeep – it doesn't necessarily explain the extension of resident upkeep beyond the boundaries of the private home. Community pride appears to be a significant factor in motivating residents to maintain and enhance public spaces, with upkeep being a collective endeavour borne out of social relations among the resident community. The engagement of residents in the development process seems to be the common factor, particularly at Nieuw Leiden where streets and public areas appear well maintained by residents even where the majority of housing stock is for public rent from the municipality.

This connection between the residents' role in shaping their home environment and maintenance of the neighbourhood commons remains under-researched at present, but there are threads of evidence suggesting a connection between mode of housing production and collective efficacy, and between collective self- or custom-build, the social community and maintenance.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored the shared physical and social resources of neighbourhood commons that can accrue in collective self-build schemes, where residents are actively engaged in both the realisation of their own homes and the planning of the wider space beyond the immediate home environment. Allowing residents to 'develop mastery over their places of habitat' (Linn, 1969, 65) can permit wider ownership or 'domestication of space', in which the boundaries between private and public property become less demarcated. This is reflected in physical properties of place,

including shared spaces; the interaction between homes and streets; subtle territorial boundaries that permit an uninterrupted flow between private and public areas; and the visible domestication of public areas that encourages long-term maintenance and upkeep of both domestic and shared public areas. These individual and collective pursuits recall an older practice of home and city making that has become widely splintered, abstracted and outsourced.

We are now beginning to understand the effects that splintering and abstraction in the home and neighbourhood environment have in diminishing the relationships and bonds between members of a community that are necessary for building and holding societies together. In a recent article in the *Financial Times*, Tyler Brûlé (2016) questions whether 'the upsurge in isolated, frustrated individuals willing to go forth and blow themselves up, or get shot while killing and maiming others, [is] a result of being repelled by cities'. He asks bluntly whether, as societies, we should be 'focussing more on the importance of social capital and maybe, just maybe, put a bit more emphasis on the quality of our communities'. The options available to policymakers to encourage the development of integrated communities are limited. However, allowing the space for the common endeavour of building a home should be an attractive option, if made accessible to a diversity of social groups and well integrated into the wider community. The evidence of this chapter is that collective self-build can catalyse relations between residents, while the physical qualities of place produced both by collective decision-making over the shared and public areas of the neighbourhood commons and the collectivisation of individual decisions over private space can help renew and sustain these relations.

3

Models of self-build and collaborative housing in the United Kingdom

Martin Field

Introduction

This chapter lays out a basis for recognising and understanding the variety of housing and neighbourhood development practices that are taking place in the United Kingdom when local people seek to take charge of creating the houses and places in which they would wish to live. It identifies some of the changing terminology used as broad *descriptions* of this activity, highlights distinctions between the models or *typologies* of local endeavours, and compares the local varieties of activities with what are recognisable motivations for bringing about local change. It finally takes a brief look at the kinds of activities that can be identified within formal strategies and policies at central and local government levels, and considers the extent to which any such formal recognition reflects the full breadth of the practices identified in the text.

Definitions of 'collective' engagements

Recent briefings to UK parliamentary committees[1] have sought to describe what distinguishes housing projects at the 'grassroots' level from the mainstream business of volume housebuilders and other large-scale housing providers.[2] What such basic summaries do not make immediately clear is what range of activities might be taking place under such descriptions, nor what the different kinds of *aspirations* could be that underpin the goals of 'community' or grassroots engagements. The variety of terms have been used as labels for what local people are doing

when they drive forward particular housing or neighbourhood development activities include 'collaborative', 'community-led', 'mutual', 'user-led', 'self-organised', 'self-provided', even '*alternative* housing'. In practice, however, a somewhat haphazard use of these and other descriptive terms has at times obscured a more nuanced understanding of the rich breadth of activities that has emerged. As Bektas et al. note,

> there is a limited understanding about *how* different communities lead their projects … Consequently, there is a need to canvas existing movements, their typologies, driving values and expectations from their housing, in order to identify a required design process for community-driven housing projects. (2014, 1)

A stereotypical interpretation of the term 'self-build' would be that it refers to household ambitions to build property for one's own personal use. This would certainly resonate with the interest evidenced in the 2011 YouGov survey commissioned by the Building Societies Association, which suggested:

> 53% of people in the UK would consider building their own home given the opportunity … the Coalition Government reported that 100,000 people were looking for building plots at that time.

Yet whilst housebuilding activity is strongly represented in what follows below, it is important to place this alongside a recognition of the UK's history of the collective endeavours that have promoted new developments and other tenancy initiatives. Two key issues are central to understanding this breadth of experience within the contemporary scene now found in the UK. The first is that some terms are *embrace descriptions* of similar or complementary approaches to the general values underpinning how local activities are being arranged and undertaken, and to a large part can be considered as fairly synonymous with each other. The second is that some terms are for the particular manner in which activities relate to quite distinct forms of community-based or self-selected housing ambitions, activities that can range in scale from actions on single properties, undertaken by single households, to much broader engagements on behalf of much wider communities. When applied to endeavours being put into action, these terms really act as labels of *particular typologies*, and it is useful to be clear both on their distinctive qualities and where they have a precision beyond the other more generalised descriptions.

The subtle separation of these issues needs some elaboration to clarify what is currently taking place within the UK. A core point of reference can be the contemporary work undertaken by the Building and Social Housing Foundation to help coordinate the resources and capacities of the community-led housing sector and the range of practical work and initiatives that are focused on creating local cost-effective and affordable housing provision,

> [where] people are involved in meeting their own housing needs and wants. The route taken depends on things like the nature of the demand, available resources, location and type of activity. Approaches encompass new build, regeneration and the use of existing buildings. Community-led housing groups may form on the basis of a geographical connection or something else they have in common. (Building and Social Housing Foundation, 2016a)

Implicit in this summary are echoes of general values that relate to acting on one's own behalf or in unison with others that were teased out by earlier commentators. Duncan and Rowe (1993) applied a focus to the kinds of development activity being initiated:

> if we consider, first, who initiates development, finds land, manages the scheme and owns the housing before allocation to consumers and, secondly, who actually builds it. *Self-provision* refers therefore to all housing provision forms where it is the household itself that acts as promoter and developer … Alternatively, the household may itself (individually or collectively) also carry out the bulk of the building work. This is *self-build* housing. (1993, 1332; emphasis added)

Barlow et al. (2001), in their turn, were more prescriptive about the relationship of property *ownership* to the participating households included in any description:

> the term 'self build housing' … covers all instances where home buyers are involved in the production of their new home rather than buying from a speculative developer or renting from a landlord (2001, 1)

although they also provided a clear caveat that 'the extent of personal involvement may vary' (2001). Yet even at the time these papers were

prepared, 'self-build' housing was neither an activity solely undertaken by 'home buyers', nor only undertaken by individual households acting in relative isolation from others. The 1990s saw clear opportunities for *group* self-build schemes able to make use of state-provided housing development finance to build low-cost housing for sale or rent, and post-WWII Britain had numerous examples of group self-build schemes that helped build out the expanding suburbs of urban areas.[3] Turning the focus onto what actions are undertaken *collectively* is reflected in discussions on European 'commonalities of practice'. As Brunoro notes:

> Collective self-organized (CSO) housing refers to the process of a collective of individuals that organize, finance, plan and commission their own housing projects, … CSO projects require a certain level of community involvement, and a high level of participation in the project development process. (2013, 1)

A theme-focused working group of the European Network for Housing Research (ENHR) has since started a focus on the *participative* nature of community-based housing initiatives by emphasising the relationships underpinning them:

> the recent proliferation of these projects can be seen to a large extent as a response to a perceived failure of institutional systems of housing provision to fulfil the above housing needs and aspirations of a growing number of households across Europe. All in all, the multi-dimensional nature of these projects requires the establishment of long-term collaborative relationships not only amongst residents but also between the latter and a wide range of external stakeholders.[4]

I summarise in Box 3.1 the embracive descriptions of the separate kinds of housing and neighbourhood activities which are, to a greater or lesser extent, synonymous with one another, and which will be explored in more detail below.

Box 3.1

Self-provided housing: households taking direct responsibility for creating housing opportunities to meet their own needs, whether through their own individual activities or in collaboration with others.
Self-build housing: housing built or arranged by individuals or groups of households for their own use, although this may be as part of a scheme organised by a group.

It can be noted that the work of the Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF) with the UK's 'community-led housing sector' has also suggested a set of 'principles' of what will constitute the practical workings of separate housing and neighbourhood projects inside the sector:

The legal form and activities of each community-led housing scheme depend on the outcomes needed, but share common principles:

1. The community is integrally involved throughout the process in key decisions like what is provided, where, and for whom. They don't necessarily have to initiate the conversation, or build homes themselves.
2. There is a presumption that the community group will take a long-term formal role in the ownership, stewardship or management of the homes.
3. The benefits of the scheme to the local area and/or specified community group are clearly defined and legally protected in perpetuity.

(BSHF, 2016b)

Typologies and motivations

It is the last point listed above – the intended 'benefits' sought by any particular community-led scheme – that now needs more explanation to clarify the connection or relationship of 'intentions' to ongoing practical works. The BSHF has an ongoing collaboration with various national bodies inside the community-led sector that have roles as support agencies for particular kinds of community-based housing

and neighbourhood development, and which used to meet together as an embryonic but voluntary alliance under the name of the Mutual Housing Group. From the separate but complementary workings of those national and support bodies, a summary list of their various approaches to, and values of, housing and neighbourhood development can be drawn together. These act as a starting point for identifying where and how these can individually differ from each other and are outlined in Box 3.2. As a brief note, there is no order of magnitude or importance to this list (and the names of separate promotional bodies).

Box 3.2

Self-build housing: Housing arranged by individuals or groups for their own use; individuals typically commission the construction of a new house from a builder, contractor or package company or, in a modest number of cases, physically build a house for themselves. [cf. National Custom and Self-Build Association]

Custom-build housing: Housing where the future households have engaged a specialist developer to help plan and deliver the home (i.e. less hands-on than classic 'self-build' projects). [cf. National Custom and Self-Build Association]

Co-operative/mutual housing: Schemes with a membership limited to those who live in the homes provided, and where the 'mutual' membership democratically controls the actions and assets of the organisation through general or other meetings. [cf. Radical Routes, Confederation of Co-operative Housing]

Tenant management organisation: Organisations in which council or housing association tenants and leaseholders collectively take on responsibility for managing the homes they live in; resident members create an independent legal body and usually elect a tenant-led management committee to run organisations, set up on a variety of scales. [cf. National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations]

Self-help housing: Bringing empty or derelict properties back into use through renovation by community projects, often involving property acquired by the local authority from the private sector. [cf. Self Help Housing]

Community land trust: A non-profit organisation run by volunteers that develops housing or other assets at permanently affordable levels and holds the asset(s) in trust for long-term community benefit. [cf. National Community Land Trust Network]

Cohousing:[5] Neighbourhood development projects (typically 15–35 households) with self-contained dwellings focused around a 'common house' which has other shared spaces and facilities, and where vehicles are kept to the development site periphery, thereby allowing residents to maximise their social interactions and leisure activities. [cf. UK Cohousing Network]

Low impact housing: The development of property and the use of suitable building materials which either enhance, or do not significantly diminish, the environmental quality of the settings in which dwellings are placed. [cf. Ecovillage Network]

Intentional community: A planned residential community (such as a 'commune'), designed to have a high degree of social cohesion and teamwork; members typically hold a common social, political, religious, or spiritual vision. [cf. Fellowship for Intentional Community Foundation; Diggers & Dreamers]

Looking at the overall information and promotions of the national (and international) bodies quoted here, a further summary can be constructed of the complementary underlying motivations and aspirations for local change and development that feature in one of more of the listed typologies, and of the kinds of benefits and outcomes that are sought when these typologies are put into action:

- building new property for one or more households;[6]
- providing affordable housing, for rent or sale, for allocation to local people;
- providing, owning or managing property for one's own household to rent;
- taking control of, or refashioning, local housing services;
- creating resident-led housing options for older residents;
- renovating or reusing derelict, vacant or under-used property;
- creating eco-sensitive, low-impact and 'green' accommodation;
- living together for shared religious, political, or other beliefs;
- building 'intentional communities', places for 'group living' or 'utopian' life;
- designing and building shared or 'intentional' neighbourhoods.

This list of desired or intended outcomes can then be seen to be connected to particular expressions of community-led activities as laid out in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Connecting baseline motivations with UK community-led housing practice – Field (2016a)

Baseline aspiration:	Dominant connections evident with particular collaborative or self-build engagements:
Building **new property**	Self-build housing Custom-build housing Cohousing Community land trusts Other local 'development trusts'
Providing **affordable** housing *(for sale or rent)*	Co-operative housing Self-help housing Community land trusts Other local 'development trusts'
Providing collectively-managed property **to rent**	Co-operative housing Self-help housing Community land trusts Tenant management organisations
Refashioning local **housing services**	Co-operative housing Tenant management organisations (including 'community gateways', as being TMOs for large-scale management of stock and services)
Options for **older residents**	Cohousing Co-operative housing Tenant management organisations
Renovating **derelict or vacant** property	Self-help housing Co-operative housing Community land trusts
Creating **eco-sensitive** or **low-impact** dwellings	Self-build and custom-build housing Eco-villages Community land trusts Other local 'development trusts'
Living together for shared beliefs	Co-operative housing Tenant management organisations 'Intentional' groups (including 'communes')
Building **'intentional' or 'utopian'** communities	Communes Cohousing Eco-villages
Building **shared** or **'intentional'** neighbourhoods	Cohousing Eco-villages Other local 'development trusts'

There is an obvious 'health warning' that goes with attempting the kind of presentation contained in Table 3.1, as the suggested 'connections' and the local activities described are certainly not things that can only happen in isolation from each other; one local project could hypothetically involve 'self-build' units being constructed by their future occupants, rental properties being arranged to provide an 'older persons' cohousing' project, and all of this within an area that is to have a 'community land trust' as the long-term freeholder of the site. Yet it is fair to note that no single typology is likely to be used in response to *all* of the motivations listed earlier. It is more the case that particular intentions shaped a local project's choice of typology for its practical identity, and for what it communicates to the external world.

Formal and pre-existing housing bodies such as housing associations, local authority housing departments, charities and almshouses might have an involvement with individual collaborative and self-build housing projects, either as partners or 'enablers', occasionally even as initiators. In the main, however, the general operations of these kinds of bodies are increasingly distinct from those of the locally controlled projects and motivations being linked together here. It therefore seems appropriate to classify separately these formal bodies from the other kinds of local organisations and initiatives that are more directly accountable to local people in highly localised settings. Table 3.1 is therefore a precis of the *indicative* kinds of engagement by distinctive approaches for housing and neighbourhood development with underlying personal and community-minded motivations.

A summary of what some of these activities have achieved to date can also be given as percentages of overall *community-controlled* stock, collated from data supplied by national community-led agencies as depicted in Figure 3.1.[7]

The place of 'collaborative/self-build housing' in contemporary UK policies

The depiction of 'community-controlled stock' in Figure 3.1 does not include data on self-build or custom-build stock. As already noted, data on UK house completions does not present a complete picture of annual activity across all forms of house-building. It is generally accepted that the people providing houses for themselves in one form or another represent 7–10 per cent of annual UK supply, a significantly

CLH categories by housing stock size
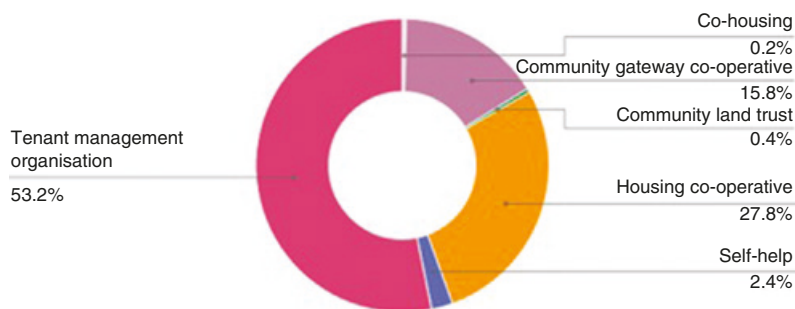
Figure 3.1 BSHF data on UK 'community-led' housing, cf. Fisher (2016)

lower amount than many other European countries (see also Benson and Hamiduddin's introduction to this volume; Stevens, this volume).[8] This low percentage of new homes completed through self-build is one that prompted the Conservative government manifesto in 2015 to contain (amidst other populist issues) the pledge 'to double UK self-build and custom build completions by 2020', fed by unease in the 2010–15 term of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government about the seemingly static levels of housing supply from the mainstream private sector. This stimulated a willingness to look at maximising all kinds of ways to increase national housing supplies, including a look at the potential for increased contributions to come from community-based housing initiatives.

Such a willingness can be seen as drawing on the previous development of other 'pro-community' policy imperatives that had already been enshrined within the government's 'Big Society' concept, which promoted values from 'a wealth of traditions and ideas about strengthening communities, civic action and co-ownership of public services' (PASC, 2011), and instigated new powers under the Localism Act 2011 to increase local opportunities for communities to undertake 'small-scale, site-specific, community-led developments' (DCLG, 2011, Part 5 Community Empowerment).

The year 2011 also saw the production of both the government's 'National Housing Strategy', which contained a firm commitment to promote distinctive development designs 'that reflect local character and identity' (DCLG, 2011, 57), and a national 'Self Build Action Plan' (NaCSBA, 2011) from a co-ordination of industry-government working groups established by the Housing Minister to look at different ways

to support the 'self-build' sector. The following year the publication of the government's new national and statutory planning framework – the National Planning Policy Framework – included the detail of an entirely new local planning process, through which local communities could establish local 'neighbourhood plans' to mould local development; made mention of delivering a 'wide choice of high quality homes'; and gave explicit directions to local planning authorities

> to plan for a mix of housing based on current and future demographic trends, market trends and the needs of different groups in the community (such as … people wishing to build their own homes). (DCLG, 2012, 13, para. 50)

Subsequent central policy developments have included various initiatives to help make sites available for community builders, provide finance to cover aspects of scheme development costs, and 'a general reduction in red tape' for all kinds of housebuilding enterprises. The new Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 (HM Government, 2015) states that it now provides the means to

> improve the data held on the demand for self/custom-build and place a requirement on authorities to have regard to individuals/ bodies who have expressed an interest in acquiring land for self-build purposes.

The 2015 Act furthermore required municipal authorities to set up 'registers' to record the level of local interest that can be identified in various kinds of 'self-build' and 'custom-build' housing projects (see also Stevens, this volume), while the Housing and Planning Act 2016[9] laid out the basis for how local authorities could provide the 'rights' to 'serviced' building plots on which such interests could build, and some new grant frameworks that could be made available in particular areas, such as coastal areas that display inflated local housing markets due to high numbers of second homes. The terminology in some of these regulatory pieces has tended to describe activity as 'self-build' and 'custom-build' housing; however, it has been made clear that they pertain to the projects and ambitions of individuals and of groups.

Aside from such central government initiatives, however, what general or specific 'policy hooks' are identifiable at the local level for communities looking for the ways and means to turn cherished aspirations into real and lasting local change? The parliamentary reports noted

earlier had themselves reflected on statements concerning what have remained as particular barriers to more community-led initiatives taking place: problems with acquiring sites; local planning complexities; and other constraints in securing sufficient finances (cf. Wallace et al., 2013). Is there evidence emerging that central policy imperatives are beginning to be reflected in more explicit and practical support for 'collaborative' and/or 'self-build' housing activities at the local level?

A series of desk-based 'content analysis' exercises were undertaken at successive stages during 2014–16. These reviewed a range of publicly available planning and housing development strategies and documents adopted in recent times by English local authorities. The analysis considered what can be evidenced of any explicit reference to, or encouragement for, the possibility that local housing provisions might be delivered through local people themselves, in one format or another. A focus has also been put on what the *nature* of any such envisaged activity might be perceived to be.

The documentation considered has been from three broad categories:

1. documents that shape specific local *planning* principles, variously termed core strategies, core spatial strategies, local development frameworks, local plans or neighbourhood plans;
2. documents describing *housing* principles and policies, relating to housing needs, housing strategies and other housing market assessments, and affordable housing;
3. documents relating to support for *broader activities* within local communities, variously termed or described as community strategies, sustainable community strategies, community plans, corporate plans, voluntary sector strategies or engagement and involvement strategies.

Not all these kinds of documents have equal 'weight' in terms of how they relate to formal decision-making on statutory and other local stakeholder functions – the documents that relate to formal planning requirements are crucially more important for the use and designation of land and building than are the more general summaries of 'housing need' or statements of 'support for the voluntary sector'. It is also correct to note that there are a good many general documents and local strategies that describe formal intent to 'liaise' and 'engage' with local communities, although many of these are worded in very general terms. Considered together, however, they provide a reasonable

indication of whether or not any practical possibility for *how* people may build and/or control their own homes has been given formalised or specific attention.[10]

The scrutiny applied to each individual document has been to find if there has been any specific mention of key terms that could refer to 'collaborative/self-build' housing provision in general, or to individual typologies – principally the terms:

> *'Self-build'; 'Custom-build'; 'Self-help'; 'Co-operative'; 'Community land trust'; 'Cohousing'; and 'Community-led'.*[11]

This exercise has looked at documentation from:

(a) selected major metropolitan urban areas;
(b) county rural areas; and finally
(c) the first 50 of England's new neighbourhood plans.

The results of this set of reviews are set out below in turn.

(a) Metropolitan urban areas

The documents reviewed pertain to the local authorities that are part of England's three largest urban conurbations: Greater London, Greater Manchester and Birmingham. The first two of these are well-defined and recognised metropolitan areas, with active umbrella-bodies taking increasing roles in local planning and development issues (namely the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA). The 'Greater Birmingham' area has no equivalent umbrella-body, so the authorities researched under this heading include the central core of the city of Birmingham plus adjacent authorities most usually associated with the central aspects of the urban and 'Black Country' conurbation: Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

This 'urban' cohort was therefore 49 local authorities in total, plus 'sub-regional' documentation from the GLA and AGMA websites and from the closest comparator in the Birmingham conurbation. The different sets of conclusions can be summarised as follows:

(i) local authority areas with *zero* mention of any of the terms under review:
  Greater Birmingham – 1 out of 6: equivalent to 16 per cent of all authorities

Greater London – 14 out of 33: equivalent to 43 per cent of all authorities

Greater Manchester – 4 out of 10: equivalent to 40 per cent of all authorities

(ii) local authority areas where the sole mention of any of the terms under review is *a general mention*: (i.e. the mention is not housing-specific, e.g. 'co-operative' bodies for non-housing services, like 'energy supply co-ops' or 'food co-ops'):

Greater Birmingham – 3 out of 6: equivalent to 50 per cent of all authorities

Greater London – 12 out of 33: equivalent to 36 per cent of all authorities

Greater Manchester – 2 out of 10: equivalent to 20 per cent of all authorities

(iii) local authority areas *with specific mention* of the terms under review:

Greater Birmingham – 2 out of 6: equivalent to 33 per cent of all authorities

Greater London – 7 out of 33: equivalent to 21 per cent of all authorities

Greater Manchester – 4 out of 10: equivalent to 40 per cent of all authorities

Table 3.2 shows these results in more detail.

Of the 49 authorities examined across the three urban conurbations, 13 authorities (equivalent to 27 per cent of the total) have a specific inclusion in one or more of their formal strategies for 'collaborative' and/or 'self-build' housing activities (three authorities in Greater London and three authorities in Greater Manchester include references to mutual/community-led activities that are both 'housing' and 'non-housing' in character). All the individual typologies and terms investigated received specific mention within one of other of these 13 authorities, with the exception of any specific mentions of 'self-help' housing or 'cohousing'. The predominant mention is for designated 'self-build' activity, with at least double the number of mentions recorded for the next most frequently mentioned term, namely 'custom-build' activity.

(b) 'Rural' districts and counties

A similar exercise was conducted on the strategic documentation and policies of a couple of rural county areas, with the intention of gaining a first impression of any meaningful difference of emphasis here

Table 3.2 Metropolitan areas (cf. Field 2016a, 2016b)

Documentation from metropolitan areas (49 authorities in total)							
	Self-build	*Custom-build*	*Self-help*	*Housing co-ops*	*Land trusts*	*Cohousing*	*Community-led*
References from core urban area authorities	9	4	0	1	3	0	1

Table 3.3 Rural districts and counties (cf. Field 2016a, 2016b)

Documentation from rural districts and counties (18 authorities in total)							
	Right to Build	*Self/custom-build*	*Self-help*	*Housing co-ops*	*Land trusts*	*Cohousing*	*Community-led*
References by North Yorkshire authorities	7	6	0	1	6	2	5
References by Leicestershire authorities	1	1	0	0	1	0	3*

[* Three mentions are for 'community-led planning'/'community-led strategies', but these are not specific to 'housing' matters.]

between the relatively sparsely occupied nature of rural areas and the more densely populated urban areas noted above. As Moore (2014) has observed, given that initiatives like the creation of new community land trusts already show a steady increase within very rural places, is this simply to do with the rural areas not undergoing the same inflationary and competing pressures of the UK's denser urban areas, or could it relate more to the degree of sympathy displayed in rural ones for local community-led initiatives to be able to secure local resources?

The main rural authorities used for this part of this review were 16 in number, across the two counties of North Yorkshire and Leicestershire, plus their core city-neighbours of York and Leicester, and other documentation from strategic bodies with a remit across all or part of a county (such as the North Yorkshire National Park authority), as laid out in Table 3.3.

It is noticeable that there are quite different degrees of interest for collaborative and self-build housing in the two county areas

considered. The Midlands authorities appear to have given much less specific consideration to whether there is a need to court or respond to such ambitions in their local communities, than have the authorities in North Yorkshire.

The northern area is also noticeable for two other reasons. It is the only place where 'cohousing' has been found in all the documentation considered to date – the two references both relate to potential ideas of cohousing projects for older people. It is also the only place identified to date where authorities make specific reference of how local communities might acquire resources under any 'Right to Build' entitlements.[12]

(c) Neighbourhood plans

The third kind of review of emerging local policies has been the consideration given to what promotion of the housing activities of local people or local groups is identifiable in the first generation of neighbourhood plans that had emerged within the English planning system by mid-2015. Layard and Field (2015, 2017) identified that 49 out of the first 50 neighbourhood plans include specific concerns and priorities for local housing provisions, of which seven contain explicit references to the promotion of future community-focused housing activities, as outlined in Table 3.4 below.

All the communities represented in the neighbourhood plan areas are either in rural parishes or in discrete semi-rural/semi-urban parts of district authorities. It is legitimate to wonder if Table 3.4 provides additional support for what was asked above: are the smaller rural communities naturally more sympathetic to ideas for community-based vehicles like 'land trusts'? Land trusts are clearly the kind of potential activity that has received the greatest number of specific policy inclusions within the plans reviewed.

Table 3.4 Documentation from neighbourhood plans (cf. Layard and Field 2015, 2017)

Documentation from neighbourhood plans (50 in total)							
	Self-build	*Custom-build*	*Self-help*	*Housing co-ops*	*Land trusts*	*Cohousing*	*Community-led*
References by first 50 plans	2	1	0	0	4	0	0

Final remarks

This chapter has provided an overview of what can be identified and understood as 'collaborative and self-build' housing activity in the UK. Yet definitions relating to public life do tend to come and go, both in line with fashion and as a result of other changes of circumstances. The 'community sector' has experienced many reforms in how different terminologies have brought particular aspects of social and political engagement into the spotlight. Yet whilst debate can be had on any general or specific descriptions for what distinguishes 'community-centred' housing and neighbourhood development activities from other mainstream engagements, what should not be left in doubt is what will always lie at the core of those activities: namely, local people being in control of the decisions taken to progress the housing and neighbourhood provisions they seek for themselves, and local residents and occupants of any property involved having the accountability for what decisions are finally undertaken.

Preliminary examination of statutory policies does provide some first 'benchmarks' that can help gauge what degree of overt support is manifest for these kind of initiatives, as well as an initial look at what steers contemporary imaginations about urban living. It is clear that most of the local authorities reviewed are familiar with forms of 'collective' or community-steered organisations, even with some bodies that might deliver versions of local services. And some authorities do display a 'one-off support' for individual community initiatives – the sale of a single site for a community-build project here, or support for a tenant-management initiative there. It is still clear, however, that there are many authorities that have yet to turn such a general familiarity into any overt and formalised encouragements for how local people could routinely be directly engaged with the delivery of future housing provision and the shape of neighbourhood developments.

It will be interesting to track how changes in policies and in policy-making will come to influence different ideas over the next few years – such as tracking the impact of the new 'self-build registers' that are now required of local authorities, and the extent to which they do or do not help more projects acquire actual sites on which to build. There is also a substantial emergence of a new 'combined devolution' to English local authority areas, ostensibly to enhance the role of local councils, their partners and their communities in deciding *how* to respond to the demands and needs of twenty-first-century life. A great deal of this new focus will involve housing and planning matters, some of it for quite

large-scale change. It will be so important that the current momentum behind the UK's community-led housing sector can use such opportunities to push its own promise to the fore at both the macro scale and in the very local settings where it is already finding such success.

Acknowledgements

4

Eco-homes for all: why the socio-cultural matters in encouraging eco-building

Jenny Pickerill

Self-build homes come in all shapes and sizes and are driven by a variety of intentions. Different budgets, environments and regulations shape them. I am particularly interested in those who self-build homes based on ecological principles and within a small budget – affordable eco-homes (Pickerill, 2016). These homes are especially interesting because eco-housing is often inaccurately assumed to cost more to build than conventional homes, and although cheaply assembled eco-homes have long existed, they are little understood and too often marginalised as 'quirky' and idiosyncratic outliers (Pickerill and Maxey, 2009) (for example, Figure 4.1). In fact, the intellectual and political marginalisation of these houses exemplifies exactly why the socio-cultural is so important in understanding self-build homes and their potential.

Encouraging more eco-homes remains a difficult task hindered by risk adversity, lack of knowledge and skills, reliance on technological fixes, infrastructure issues and certain expectations of comfort and convenience. While Roaf et al. (2007) argue that 'architects who cannot incorporate energy and water conservation, reuse and renewable energy into their buildings will become dinosaurs, as will their white elephant buildings' (Roaf et al., 2007, 318), environmentally damaging practices are continuing and waste is still rife in the house construction industries. We need to do better. In part, the lack of progress is a result of many government policy agendas that prioritise technological approaches to eco-housing, a highly competitive land market economy and conservative construction industries. For example, in Britain eco-housing is reduced to a checklist of objects that is resisted by developers and builders (Osmani

and O'Reilly, 2009) and is unlikely to be as effective as hoped (McManus et al., 2010).

Indeed, the construction of eco-houses has been slow and they remain a marginal component of housing markets in countries such as England, the USA and Australia (Chambers, 2011). If the technology and knowledge are already available and yet there is still resistance to eco-housing, then it would seem appropriate to suggest that other issues are hindering its growth. While there are clear economic, political and land barriers to the growth of self-build in Britain, many of which are well known, here I focus on the understudied socio-cultural processes. This requires examining not just which socio-cultural factors are implicated in self-build, but in particular how these socio-cultural processes are relevant to understanding self-build eco-homes.

It is timely, then, to learn from self-build eco-homes, which often focus less on technological solutions and instead embody a more holistic approach to the environment and the social. It is only through analysis of the socio-cultural dimensions of eco-homes and their agency that homes can be designed and built which are suitable for the local environmental context, social needs and economic conditions of a place. By examining these homes and their associated social practices and processes, it is possible to identify what enabled them to be built and therefore how the construction of more eco-homes (of all varieties) could be further encouraged.

Methodology

The empirical material on which this work is based has been collected since 2006, with most material collected during a six-month period in 2010, and the most recent data collection undertaken over three months in 2016. In all, 18 eco-homes or eco-communities were visited across England, Scotland and Wales. These are identified in the text where possible, although some communities wished to remain anonymous. The criteria for case study selection were that: (a) eco-homes were ecological; (b) the houses were self-built; and (c) houses were affordable and did not cost more than 35 per cent of household income. The majority of cases were new-build constructions rather than renovations. The focus on new build was chosen because it tended to offer more affordable housing (in that eco-retrofitting is unfortunately quite costly) and it was easier for new builds to reach a high ecological standard, whereas retrofits were often limited in the eco-features that they could install.

Figure 4.1 Hybrid self-built eco-home at Lama Foundation, New Mexico, USA[1]

Participation in the case studies was sought, though the extent of involvement varied significantly between them. When possible, I joined activities on-site such as building, gardening, scything, cooking and eating communally, engaging with group meetings, socialising and staying on-site for several days and up to two weeks. For each case study, in-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted, photographs taken, field diary observations made, and sketches of the site were recorded. At several sites it was also possible to access archival material. A total of 38 interviews were conducted, with most interviews lasting at least an hour, and several lasting over two hours. All interviewees gave written consent and were able to withdraw at any time. If requested, anonymity was given to interviewees as well as case study locations.

Defining eco-homes

Eco-homes are a product of the social, economic, geographical and political environments in which they are built. While the intended functions of an eco-house are often quite simple, they are only achieved through complex interactions between different forms, approaches, technologies and occupants. Ecological architecture calls for an understanding of the

peculiarities of place, materials, cultural context, climate, solar and wind patterns, people's lifestyles and needs, and existing biodiversity. This can then all be used to design a house that requires far less energy both to build and to run. Most importantly, it is the interconnectedness of these features that requires attention and understanding (Wines, 2000); 'buildings are part of a complex interaction between people, the buildings themselves, the climate and the environment' (Roaf et al., 2007, 24). In response to the plethora of factors that need to be taken into consideration, there are a multitude of types and forms of eco-houses. The term can include zero- or low-carbon houses, low-impact developments, sustainable housing, green building, passive houses (*passivhaus*), zero-net energy housing and energy-plus houses (see, for example, Roaf et al., 2007; Williams, 2012; Broome, 2008). This diversity has complicated attempts to define what an eco-building is and what it does.

Eco-housing is best understood by distinguishing between the *function* and the *form* of a building. The function refers to the intended outcome of a design choice, whereas the form refers to the process by which that function is to be achieved. Thus, the forms of eco-housing vary enormously and include using highly technological systems or low-tech vernacular natural-build approaches to achieve the same function of low-carbon housing. Although highly entwined, the function does not always determine the form of eco-housing. Instead, there is a continuous evolution of architectural and building practices aiming to improve the ability of different forms of houses to achieve these functions, resulting, for example, in a broad range of forms of eco-houses.

As the form of eco-housing is different from its function, it is possible to identify certain commonalities characterising eco-houses, without implying how they might be realised. This openness to diversity is important because there is no agreement on the perfect way to build an eco-house. Indeed, 'sustainable construction strikes a balance between the potentially conflicting demands of the use of energy, other resources and ecology' (Broome, 2008, 18) and these demands result in diverse building approaches. The *common functions of an eco-house* are that a building, across its whole life cycle,[2] should: (a) minimise resource use (in materials, in embodied energy, energy requirements, water use); (b) minimise waste (in materials, space, energy, leakage); (c) maximise use of renewable energy (such as solar, wind, water); and (d) maximise use of renewable materials (such as straw, sheep's wool, wood, earth).

This separation between function and form also helps explain some of the problems encountered by ecological architecture: a focus on function can limit eco-houses 'to checklists of moral responsibility

and remedial action' (Wines, 2000, 68), deflecting from a broader focus on aesthetics or a concern with developing new ways of connecting eco-housing to its cultural and natural context (Lombardi et al., 2011). However, a focus on materials and aesthetics can preclude adequate consideration of required building performance in terms of durability, comfort and energy supply.

As such, there is no single, perfectly efficient, functioning eco-house; instead, eco-houses are a relative progression towards reducing waste. Different houses deal with waste issues differently and this leads to a broad variety of eco-houses. As a result, eco-houses are more heterogeneous than they are similar, and this hybridity in form can complicate their promotion (Guy and Osborn, 2001). Understanding eco-houses as an interrelation between function and form enables a clearer understanding of this diversity *and* of how form can override function, or function override form. As one member of the Newark retrofit project explained:

> To be honest, we didn't give too much thought to aesthetics. It was more function over form. It was really this is what we need to do to make it perform … we weren't really striving for aesthetics; we were striving for performance. (Male interviewee, Newark)

Eco-houses are being built to deal with the issues of waste through a range of approaches, including: structural innovations; size alterations; harnessing renewable technologies; retrofitting existing housing stock and changing occupant behaviour and practices. Each approach has benefits, limitations and financial costs. Ultimately, eco-building is the negotiation of a set of dilemmas where different logics influence the final outcome of an eco-house (Guy and Osborn, 2001).

A socio-cultural analysis of eco-homes

Although the policy, economic and land-availability issues that have tended to hinder self-build eco-housing have received attention by scholars and policymakers in efforts to encourage more eco-building, little attention has been paid to socio-cultural influences. This is a mistake; for example, much of the resistance to eco-housing can be understood, and therefore tackled, through analysis of the social issues that it raises. The knowledge, capacity and technology to build eco-houses already exist. Yet relatively few eco-homes are being built and often expensive technology, rather than simple design, is relied upon to make a house more

ecologically friendly: 'one of the major problems facing environmental architecture, aside from the absence of a strong societal endorsement, is a professional choice to over-emphasize the technological advantages and undervalue the social and aesthetic aspects' (Wines, 2000, 64).

This emphasis on technology as the best way to achieve environmental measures in new housing is problematic. Technology alone cannot create eco-houses, in large part because their performance is reliant upon residents' compliance. Perhaps the best example of this is the use of manual heat exchange systems that are misused by residents opening too many windows. But occupants of eco-buildings also need to be able to 'forgive' less-than-ideal conditions at certain times; in other words, they need to work with a building rather than expect uniform functionality (Deuble and de Dear, 2012). This is not to suggest that eco-housing does not benefit from technologies; many, like micro-generation renewable energy systems, are central to reducing reliance on fossil fuels. Rather, it is the total reliance upon technologies and the technology-first approach that ignores the influence of the socio-cultural factors that limits eco-housing construction.

A socio-cultural approach reveals the complex meanings of conventional homes and thus the potentially radical challenges to residents' values and practices that eco-housing proposes (Reid and Houston, 2013). For example, houses made of straw bales limit what can be easily hung on internal walls; eco-houses might require more manual effort to manage heating and ventilation (not necessarily offering automated internal temperatures), and might limit excessive use of water such as using hose-pipes for washing cars or drives. These examples suggest just a few ways in which eco-housing might require social changes in how people live, and thus why people might resist them. At the same time, the changes required are often exaggerated through myths and assumptions furthering anxiety about eco-housing. All in all, it is not technology, or even politics, that is holding society back from adopting eco-housing; it is deep-rooted cultural and social understandings of how we live and what we expect houses to do for us.

This social perspective on eco-housing is indebted to, and builds upon, critical architecture approaches and architectural geographies. In recent years, geographers such as Lees (2001), Kraftl (2006) and Jacobs and Merriman (2011) have called for architecture to be understood as spaces of 'ongoing social practices through which space is continually shaped and inhabited' (Lees, 2001, 51). Architecture is more than a representation; it is a lived, evolving space that is shaped (and made meaningful) through the everyday practices of those using it. Similarly,

Guy (2010) argues for the need to take a social and cultural approach to sustainable architecture in order to understand its hybrid, fluid diversity and to open up the possibilities of both what sustainable architecture is and what it could be.

This socio-cultural approach requires analysis of the social practices and processes that inform house design and use, the chosen aesthetics and how they fit or contrast with their surrounds, people's perceptions of homes, how people use or misuse their homes, and the psychological desires people attach to a home. During the research, it became clear that several developers, builders and architects focused on the technological functionality of eco-houses to the detriment of considering the aesthetics, usability and desirability of homes. Greater consideration therefore needs to be given to four socio-cultural elements when understanding self-built eco-homes and when encouraging further eco-building: (1) align eco-home designs with the socio-cultural desires in a home – a space of social relations filled with emotions, traditions and politics; (2) accept that human agency is central in the functioning of an eco-home and eco-homes' functioning relies upon compliant occupants; (3) embed eco-homes into places, paying attention to what already exists in a place; and (4) reconfigure some elements of comfort to be more ecologically benign. Each of these will now be explored in turn.

Align with the socio-cultural desires in a home

Eco-homes will only be adopted if they offer what people demand from a home and allow people to live how they want to within them (NHBC Foundation, 2012). While acknowledging a huge diversity in what people demand of and desire in a home, there were some common features, shown in Table 4.1. Despite this table being dominated by quantifiable features such as location, size, affordability and green space, much of what is desired in a home is qualitative and subjective. Emotions, such as feelings about the aesthetics, light and the comfort of a house, are often crucial in house choice; indeed, 'emotional considerations can overrule practical considerations when people are choosing their new home' (Finlay et al., 2012, 5). Owning a house and home is linked to improved well-being and health, where residents enjoy the practical and emotional benefits of home-owning (Searle et al., 2009). These emotional gains can outweigh the benefits of the potential financial investments of home-owning, and such financial benefits are often of secondary importance. It is vital to

understand the contribution of this mixture of social meaning and material attributes in house choices (Papenek, 1995). The importance of these different criteria for home, and the number of socio-cultural factors included in Table 4.1, need to be taken more into account in eco-home designs.

What is demanded of and desired in a home is of course contingent on the variables of people, place and politics. Different people will attach different meanings to homes and houses and have diverse requirements of them. As Heathcote (2012) notes, despite radical changes in societies, gender relations, employment, technology and quality of life factors, houses in Britain, the USA and Australia have changed relatively little. Many of the feelings about home and desires in a house are a quest for continuity. This quest for continuity is represented in the nostalgia for certain forms of house architecture that are recreated in contemporary dwellings. As an English building constructor argued, 'the punters want what they have always done … they want a nice-looking house, at the right price, in a decent area and I can't see that changing anytime soon'.[3] While some social practices can be altered over time, as discussed further below, other desires are harder to change and need to be accommodated. The needs in a house and home do, however, change as people age (Day, 1990) and as circumstances change. As Imrie notes, bodily form changes with age, and many of us are likely to suffer a form of bodily impairment that will impact our understanding of and needs in a home (Imrie, 2003, 2004).

Addressing privacy

The tension around a desire for privacy is a good example here. Privacy is for many a key purpose of a house, albeit culturally contingent. In Britain, there is a desire and need for privacy, both from external others and internally from others in the household. Externally, this privacy is created through high garden fences, window screens (once net curtains, increasingly permanent opaque windows) and individual front doors. Internally, however, the shift towards more open-plan living since the 1950s (in response to demands for more space and light when high land costs meant building plots were smaller) has created greater shared and communal space for family living. Privacy then becomes negotiated between partners, children and household tasks, where women in particular crave privacy but struggle to find it (Munro and Madigan, 2006); 'private space within the home made an important contribution to participants' well-being and was important to participants of all ages' (Finlay et al., 2012, 4). This British need for individual privacy is less prominent in

Japan, for example, where family-centred privacy is sought rather than individual space (Ozaki, 2002).

The need to share space and therefore have less private space is perhaps the best example of how homes are being redesigned to be more ecological. In terms of housing, there is a need 'to find ways to meet people's privacy needs while keeping our home sites compact and not sprawled

Table 4.1 Common features and criteria that people demand and desire in a home

Feature	Explanation
Adaptable	Flexible in function and in response to future changing needs, especially a large main space for eating, relaxing and entertaining.
Affordable	They can attain a mortgage to buy the house or can afford it outright.
Beautiful	Aesthetically pleasing looks, period features, how a place looks and feels.
Comfortable	Comfortable, stable thermal temperature and offering convenient facilities (water, bathrooms, heat, refrigeration).
Convenient	Ease-of-use of, for example, built-in technologies, windows, layout.
Durable	A home that is long-lasting, high quality of construction and finish.
Green space	Close to parks and green open spaces and/or with its own garden.
Investment	The likelihood that a financial gain will be made.
Light	Natural light through large windows.
Location	Close to family and friends, good access to schools, healthcare, transport links and shops.
Maintainable	Easy to maintain, does not require regular or expensive maintenance.
Private	Privacy is important both through separation from external others and the provision of private spaces within a home for residents to be alone.
Quiet	Low noise pollution.
Secure	Secure physically and financially, area with a low level of crime.
Spacious	Enough room for all occupants and their different functions, good room sizes.

all over the landscape'.[4] The tendency to seek to hide from others to create privacy through buildings scattered apart increases environmental destruction and infrastructure costs (Leafe Christian, 2003). Not only have very small eco-houses been built, but many eco-house approaches advocate sharing homes with those beyond family (Jarvis, 2013). Sharing home space takes multiple forms – co-housing provides shared communal areas and private individual dwellings, while some eco-communities share a whole house. Co-housing 'combines the autonomy of private dwellings with the advantages of community living' (Williams, 2005, 200), or, as Sullivan-Catlin (2004) argues, co-housing could also be conceived of as 'a cooperative neighbourhood'. The co-housing model is proving popular because it enables a balance between privacy and sharing (Lietaert, 2010). Ideally, interaction is encouraged by ensuring that front doors face each other, while privacy is created for living rooms and through careful window placement (Leafe Christian, 2003) (Figure 4.2a & b). Sharing enables fewer resources to be used, while a good quality of life is maintained (see Hudson; Fernández Aggiroitia and Scanlon, this volume). It can involve sharing food production, sharing garden and DIY equipment, and car clubs (McCloud, 2011). Many eco-communities deliberately reduce privacy and instead encourage more communal and collective activities, such as eating together; 'there is a loose, inverse relationship between the degree of communalism and privacy' (Metcalf, 2004, 102).

Whatever the approach, however, sharing home space requires rewriting domestic norms and creating new rules of intimacy (Procupez, 2008). Litfin (2014) uses the term 'ratcheting' to describe the numerous spontaneous interactions of living in close proximity. As people move around and through the eco-community, they have many random encounters with others. People often need a balance between contact and solitude. Sharing space and time creates and tests new forms of sociality and engagement with others (Jarvis, 2011). In many eco-communities, like the Lancaster Co-housing and the Threshold Centre (LILAC), residents have navigated this tension between privacy and communality by adopting props (wearing a hat or hanging a scarf on a door is used to signal a need for privacy) and adjusting how they walk through a community depending on whether they feel sociable or not:

> People understand and respect if you want to just do a hello or good morning and then walk on. Otherwise it can take half an hour to get to the laundry and back, depending on your character … as a group of members we've got better at that, but still some people dive in straightaway with a big question. … I think we're quite respectful of

each other's time. There's a whole spectrum of how sociable, convivial people generally ought to be … if you put your head down and just walk somewhere, then people will respect that and read the body language. (Male interviewee, LILAC)

However, the design of some of the homes – with large windows and doors facing a central community space or walkway – have led some residents to adjust the internal layout of their property to reduce being overlooked. For example, in Lancaster Co-Housing, some residents have inverted the order of their internal space to position their kitchen and living space away from view. For some, these processes might be easy to adopt, but for others the shift from the individualised family-centred culture of home to a more open, fluid and shared home space requires negotiation, learning new practices or some redesign.

Human agency is central

Human agency is central to the functioning of an eco-home, and eco-homes' functioning is reliant upon compliant occupants. Occupants' practices can undermine the efficiency of an eco-home and eco-homes are as much a social as a technological challenge (Cole et al., 2010). However, human agency is not fully understood (Cole et al., 2010; Stenberg et al., 2009). There are a couple of salient examples worth exploring here. First, recent research has identified increased overall use of electricity in eco-homes because residents perceived the energy to come from ecological sources (Pilkington et al., 2011). However, such additional use of energy, whatever its source, is problematic because it still uses resources (which could be used elsewhere) and the feeling of abundance could easily influence residents' practices elsewhere. Minimising waste in housing might have a positive influence on daily practices in other areas of residents' lives and in those organisations or stakeholders involved in the construction. Fry and Sharma (2013) refer to this as the 'generativity' of eco-building that can lead to a greater capacity for environmental responsibility *per se*.

Second, residents have the ability to undo the effectiveness of technologies and design in their home. In the case of the Newark retrofit project, the house functions were reliant upon householders not opening the windows in winter. As a member of the project explained, the mechanical heat ventilation system and the gains from passive solar heating could easily be undone:

Figure 4.2a & b   Street design at LILAC (Leeds) and Lancaster
Co-Housing (Halton) (© Jenny Pickerill)

the resident needs to understand the design principles and that
in winter you don't open these [windows] … because this house
might lose lots of energy … if someone's opening windows all the
time, then it's going to get a lot colder. The Council have said to
us some of their tenants they're at home all day sitting on the sofa
watching telly, smoking with the windows open … It's about not
opening windows. (Male interviewee, Newark)

Similar problems were found by Rohracher and Ornetzeder (2002), who discovered a key inefficiency in ecological apartment buildings in Austria was residents opening windows. In eco-houses that employ technologies there is also a need for user-friendly control interfaces. Poor and confusing design and lack of occupant understanding of the systems installed have led to inefficiencies in the functionality of eco-houses (Stevenson et al., 2013). It is not just that some user control interfaces are difficult to understand, but that if eco-houses and their technologies were better designed they could act as forms of feedback to the residents that could begin to help train new behaviours and practices. For example, in a US prototype, a light display in the kitchen backsplash brightens and dims according to resource use – a potentially simple feedback to household use that is likely to have more impact than the more common data monitors.

This emphasis on understanding the two-way dynamic interaction between residents and buildings (that individuals shape buildings, and buildings shape individuals) is a productive way of acknowledging the centrality of people to eco-house functionality. As Cole et al., argue 'buildings do not consume energy; inhabitants do through the medium of architecture' (Cole et al., 2010, 340). This is not to say, however, that changes in human practices alone can necessarily dramatically alter environmental impact; 'it is incredible to note that in many parts of the world including Britain, the challenges of trying to reduce the catastrophic impacts of buildings on the environment are still left to individuals' (Roaf et al., 2007, 21). Rather, it is in the interrelationships between broader social and economic processes and the household that eco-homes are likely to be most effective (Gibson et al., 2011; Allon and Sofoulis, 2006).

Eco-homes and resident interaction

Achieving the effective functioning of eco-homes requires attending to human behaviour, practices, habits and needs (Butler, 2004). To some extent, houses have to be designed and built to suit occupants' needs; 'the eco-house becomes a working machine in which lifestyles have to be considered carefully and matched with the supply systems built into the house' (Smith, 2007, 96). However, reducing waste is as much about changing daily practices as it is about using new technologies (Shove, 2003). In conventional houses residents are locked into practices by habit and infrastructures. Eco-homes are an opportunity to change daily energy use by, for example, preventing high water use in baths (by only having showering facilities) or encouraging water conservation (by installing a

water meter) (Heiskanen et al., 2010). In this way, eco-house building is a balance between residents' needs and lifestyles that are more environmentally sustainable. Crucially, eco-homes need to be designed in ways that humans can easily operate and not easily disrupt.

A good example of this are off-grid homes, where residents have to live according to the available electricity and water that they can generate and collect. At Green Hills[5] in Scotland, living off-grid has required them to build their entire power, water and waste infrastructure themselves (Figure 4.3). As a result, they have had to make choices about which systems are feasible and which are not, and then adjust their daily practices accordingly. While they generate enough electricity through photovoltaic panels and a small wind turbine to support internal lighting and sockets to charge electronic devices, there is not enough electricity to power a fridge. They have piped rainwater to their sinks, but drinking water has to be manually collected from a stream. Their toilets are compost toilets located a short walk from their house. These small but notable differences from conventional houses are difficult to disrupt and therefore the residents adjust – by conserving drinking water, buying fewer perishable foods and relying on home-grown produce, and being alert to the amount (or lack) of energy available for charging devices. Off-grid homes, though not for everyone, illustrate what is possible when residents understand how their home functions and the limitations of its infrastructures.

Embed into place

Place matters. It matters because of its locale and how it is currently valued and understood (Vasudevan, 2011). It matters how a new eco-home connects (or not) to other places through the use of common infrastructure, or through social links to others near and far. It matters because home can be conceived of as a particularly significant type of place (Easthope, 2004; McCloud, 2011). Place matters precisely because it is more than just the locality of a piece of land. Place is how humans experience the world.

Place as containing meaning, memories, perceptions and identities, and as dynamic, unfinished and constantly evolving, was rarely acknowledged by the self-builders. Recognising the dynamism and importance of place requires eco-builders to understand existing social relations, meanings and emotional attachments to that place. Understanding place is particularly important in eco-building because 'buildings can be a point

of articulation for complex contestations over the meaning of and access to certain places' (Kraftl, 2010, 404). Unless the particularities of place are taken more into account, there is a danger that eco-homes are 'presented as the universal solution to an essentially contextual experienced and created issue' (Maher and McIntosh, 2007, 24). It is therefore important to critique processes of place-making to ensure that existing place is understood and incorporated into ongoing transformations of place.

Place is a process whereby builders can 'invest meaning into the landscape' (Johnson and Murton, 2007, 126), create diversity between and within places (Longhurst, 2013), and construct progressive forms of place which encourage sharing, compassion, tolerance and an acknowledgement of interdependence with others. In the case studies, there was a tendency to fail to incorporate existing residents' views of place and to consider place as locally bounded. In other words, it is vital that eco-homes are embedded into places as they already exist, and are designed to 'fit in' with existing architecture and socio-cultural norms.

An example of this tension is Lammas eco-village, Pembrokeshire, West Wales. Lammas is a low-impact development of nine smallholdings, which operates off-grid with its own electricity and water supply. Residents have been on site since 2009. They have also built a

Figure 4.3 Almost complete straw bale and turf-roofed house at Green Hills (© Jenny Pickerill)

Figure 4.4   Tao and Hoppi's house at Lammas eco-village, Glandwr, Wales (© Jenny Pickerill)

'community hub', which acts as an education centre, shop and as a space available for local people to use. Residents of Lammas have sought to radically alter the place in which they are building. Previously sheep grazing farmland, the residents have a vision of ecologically rejuvenating the land to increase biodiversity, productivity and the variety of wildlife species and crops (Wimbush, 2012) (Figures 4.4 and 4.5). It is a vision of abundance of nature that is rooted in a deep green and permaculture philosophy that advocates the necessity of healthy complex ecosystems for environmental and human survival.

Pont y Gafel farm was identified by Lammas as a place empty of social meaning and with a damaged natural environment. It was considered a blank canvas of physical features open to being (re)made. Repopulating farmland with humans and indigenous flora and fauna is, in part, an attempt to recreate a past when smallholders worked and cared for rural land in labour-intensive ways and, in part, a construction of a new green anti-capitalist rurality (Halfacree, 2003). In this case, Lammas is imbued with a sense of place as territory, a moral placemaking and as a frontier project. Lammas has always been very explicit in its quest to reclaim farmland and remake it as abundant productive land with ecological benefits. The place was before delegitimised as poor quality grazing land devoid of environmental and social value.

Figure 4.5   Cassi and Nigel's house at Tir y Gafel, Glandwr, Wales
(© Jenny Pickerill)

This radical rurality challenged many people's conception of a rural space and, in particular, their attachment to the rural position of Pont y Gafel farm. Lammas faced significant resistance to its proposals from local councillors, residents of Glandwr, and neighbouring farmers. Although Lammas sought to appease some local concerns – developing a Welsh language policy, improving the traffic reduction strategy and ensuring that they supported and complemented the fragile local economy – it also sought to bypass them by generating international support and taking the case to the national Welsh Assembly Planning Inspectorate.

Perceptions of place

What was missing in the early stages of Lammas was an acknowledgement of the local residents' attachment to the place of Glandwr (Devine-Wright, 2011; Van der Horst, 2007). Lammas failed to adequately communicate the relationship between its abstract green ideals and the particular place of Pont y Gafel farm. While Lammas articulated how its project fulfilled the national needs of a society (for affordable housing, renewable energy and livelihoods), it did little to communicate how and why those needs related to the particular place of Glandwr, or how Glandwr contributed to the problems which needed solving through this new place. Residents' understanding of a place was

being threatened by newcomers who wanted to remake a place they cherished; and the more it was justified with abstract ideology, the less existing residents felt that Lammas understood the meaning of the specific place of Pont y Gafel.

Lammas quickly learned that 'even in the middle of nowhere there is a rural community that you do need to engage and you do need to interact with' (Tao Wimbush, Lammas). Its biggest mistake was to initially fail to understand the complex ways in which place was viewed and valued by existing residents. Seven years on, however, relations with the local community have improved significantly. Lammas has attracted an influx of new residents to Glandwr and enlivened the local economy.

Compounding this opposition was the fact that Lammas appears to be a place of exodus – a retreat from the unsustainable practices of mainstream society and the creation of an isolated community on a remote Welsh hillside. It reflects attempts to reconnect with nature, or create a place immersed in nature. As such, it was a place of post-capitalist practices – what Carlsson and Manning (2010) refer to as 'nowtopians' – which, along with the eco-village aesthetics, excluded those who were unfamiliar with the style and facilities (such as compost toilets). This sense of place as exclusion is also present in the ways in which Lammas was trying to disrupt its connection to the mainstream through autonomous housing.

Finally, place for Lammas was relational; it related the impact of its practices to climate change, international environmental education projects, and engaging with the state and distant others. Its goals required reaching far beyond a particular place. Before being able to start building, Lammas had needed to obtain national support from the Welsh Assembly and, in so doing, became symbolic of Welsh support for sustainability innovation, thereby cementing the importance of national state support for environmental policy (Featherstone et al., 2012). Lammas also conceived of Tir y Gafel as only the first of many similar projects, and used the Glandwr farmland as a demonstration place and the community's internet presence as a way to share its methods with all. Yet place, for Lammas, was also constructed as local, in a bounded and static way. This included the quest to use only local building materials, generate its income from the land, eat locally produced food, and support the bioregional economy. This form of localism was about minimising environmental impact by reducing travel miles. Ultimately, Lammas employed a scaled notion of place as local. Lammas began by understanding place predominantly as a physical landscape. Its encounters with opposition

from the existing residents of Glandwr and its efforts to put its vision of sustainability into practice led it to develop a more complex understanding of place as a dynamic cultural and physical entity that interconnected with other places.

Reconfigure comfort

Eco-living is often associated with forgoing many elements of contemporary life (Dobson, 2007). There is an enduring perception that to be environmentally sustainable requires forgoing elements of comfort, convenience and, to a lesser extent, cleanliness (Shove, 2003). This perception of forgoing is problematic. Comfort is a particularly interesting concept because it is both hard to define and simultaneously perceived as being a crucial element of a home (Rybczynski, 1988). Comfort is neither an attribute of a material nor a universally agreed specific and measurable moment (such as a temperature). Instead, it is an ongoing process, a negotiation between different elements (such as climate, materials and bodies) in a particular place (Vannini and Taggart, 2013). While it is important to better communicate that eco-homes do not necessarily require a loss of comfort, it is also necessary that eco-homes reconfigure some elements of comfort to be more ecologically benign.

Self-builders' approaches to, and understandings of, comfort varied significantly across countries. British self-eco-builders were most likely to equate comfort with excess and sought to reject comfort as a way of signalling their environmental commitment. This was represented most obviously in the de-prioritisation of building bathrooms, which in many British eco-homes were absent (Pickerill, 2015). Thermal comfort was also reconfigured. Although many self-build eco-homes, such as the 'tiny home' at Trelay Community, Cornwall (Figure 4.6), were deliberately designed to be thermally efficient (with thick floor, wall and roof insulation, well-glazed windows and air-tightness), the residents also adjusted their expectations of internal temperatures. Unlike many conventional homes, thermal comfort in this tiny home requires manual activity – to source and chop the wood, light and maintain the log stove, and to shut down and clear out the stove after use. The effort required to heat the dwelling – and the fact that such effort is hard to maintain continuously – encourages residents to adopt other comfort practices, such as wearing additional layers of clothing, cooking and moving about. There is also an acceptance within such homes that thermal comfort will be uneven – both

Figure 4.6 A 'tiny home' at Trelay community, Cornwall (© Jenny Pickerill)

spatially in the dwelling (there are no radiators in this home) and temporally (unless 'banked-up', the fire will go out overnight). Thermal comfort in such a home is therefore variable and changeable and, for some residents, would require adjusting to.

The outcome of such an example is to accept that comfort is a process, not an attribute, and thus we need to build houses that enable people to negotiate comfort through adjustment and adaptation (Cole et al., 2008; Vannini and Taggart, 2013). This opens the possibility of ecological architecture producing comfortable homes; not homes with a guaranteed narrow comfort zone, but homes that are flexible to occupy (Brown and Cole, 2009). This understanding of comfort does, however, require challenging people's expectations (now normalised) of what thermal comfort is. In part, this includes encouraging people to enjoy the contrasts and changes in temperature around a house – what Roaf calls 'thermal delight': 'comfort can be seen simply as the absence of discomfort but thermal delight makes people happier' (Roaf et al., 2007, 319). Examples are the joy of a fresh breeze through an open window, or the sun heating our toes. This has been developed into the RayMan model, which calculates thermal comfort by taking account of people's thermal sensations (Matzarakis et al., 2010), but it also extends to individual behaviour, such as the need to wear a jumper indoors during winter (Fordham, 2000).

The debate as to whether eco-houses can be as comfortable as conventional housing is, of course, also bound up with the ongoing debates as to what is comfort and comfortable – a standardised homogenous temperature or the thermal delight of change (for example, the growth of air conditioning is a reflection of the preference for homogeneity, see Miller et al., 2012)? Our senses and experiences of bodily functions are important when evaluating new forms of living that might extend our interactions with new sensations. The implication of these different approaches to comfort is to illustrate that comfort is not predetermined or fixed; instead, it is a process that can be renegotiated. The creative and resourceful measures by which the residents of these eco-homes have established a sense of comfort suggests the possibility that other forms of comfort (particularly those which are resource-greedy) could also be reconfigured. Thus, eco-homes need to navigate the tension between being perceived as comfortable 'enough', while also reconfiguring comfort to reduce the environmental impact of daily household practices.

Conclusions

Eco-building remains a niche, marginalised as a design and an approach in all but a few countries. Too many myths persist about eco-homes being more expensive, uncomfortable, inappropriate or too quirky. The commercial construction industries remain too conservative and are resisting new techniques and new practices. The default approach to housebuilding is to ignore environmental concerns or, if the environment is considered, only to apply technological solutions. Self-build eco-homes clearly have a long way to go before they are considered the norm.

The socio-cultural expectations associated with homes complicate the adoption of more self-build affordable eco-homes. It is not just a matter of building homes to align with the existing norms and desires of residents, for to do so would undermine much of what such eco-homes offer. This is why an analysis of these cheaply assembled eco-homes too often marginalised as 'quirky' outliers is so important. If we simply build homes that accommodate existing resource demands, albeit with some small reduction in environmental impact, then we fail to fundamentally alter daily practices enough to respond adequately to climate change. Instead, these affordable eco-homes and their attempts to dramatically shift practices and consumption help us identify the limits and possibilities of eco-homes.

Through the analysis presented here, four socio-cultural elements have been identified that are crucial to understanding what these homes are trying to do and how they challenge existing norms. For each of these elements there is a question of balance to be achieved between acquiescing to existing norms and challenging them by proposing new daily practices and landscapes. The identification of an appropriate balance remains an ongoing tension in the case studies explored, although this is perhaps less a matter to be resolved than an aspect of ongoing negotiation, consisting of different dimensions. First, while there is a need to align eco-home designs with the socio-cultural desires in a home – a space of social relations filled with emotions, traditions and politics – there are also attempts to shift these expectations in, for example, notions of privacy and sharing. Second, accepting that human agency is central in the functioning of an eco-home, and that an eco-home's functioning is reliant upon compliant occupants, encourages the use of simple design features and feedback loops. It also reminds designers of the need to build systems that cannot easily be disrupted; in other words, to build robust processes that enforce ecological practices. Third, the need to embed eco-homes into places and pay attention to what already exists in a place is vital, not just for local acceptance but in order to appeal to diverse future potential residents. Finally, it is possible to reconfigure some elements of comfort to be more ecologically benign without creating discomfort. The flexibility of comfort can be utilised more.

Central to all these elements is the tension between the social (people, societal norms and structures) and the material and technological (walls, technological systems, windows, etc.) features of eco-homes. In order to fully understand eco-homes, none of these elements can be examined in isolation. They interact, shape, influence and have agency. This chapter demonstrates that we urgently need to know far more about eco-homes than just technological questions of construction or political questions of land availability. Instead, we must embrace qualitative investigations into the why, how and with what consequences people choose to build and live in these homes. Only through such analysis can we begin to understand how to encourage and enable more self-build eco-homes.

Part 2
Values, lifestyles, imaginaries

5

From cultures of resistance to the new social movements: DIY self-build in West Wales

Elaine Forde

This chapter centres on the case of self-build housing in rural West Wales linked to environmental activism and DIY culture (McKay, 1998). The case resembles the group of self-builders that Duncan and Rowe refer to as 'the cranky ideologues of the new urban left and the "post-modern peasantry" of the 1968 generation' (1993, 1351). It focuses on low-impact, autonomous dwelling as a discrete practice and its dialogue with formal development models in that context (Forde, 2015, 2016; cf. Pickerill, 2016, this volume). In particular, it advocates an approach to understanding this and other forms of self-build through the lens of provisioning, shifting focus from production- and consumption-based models of housing procurement.

While low-impact is an increasingly common way of describing relatively small-scale ecological self-build homes (which was a guiding principle for many of those who took part in the research), I couple it here with autonomy. While also known as living off-grid (see, for example, Vannini and Taggert, 2014), autonomy is more appropriate as a concept as it captures both the structural *and* infrastructural disconnection from the existing material and symbolic grids of social life. This chapter examines such low-impact, autonomous dwellings from a phenomenologically inspired dwelling perspective (see Ingold, 1995). As a form of self-building, it is notable for being socially procured, using ideas about nature and the environment as guiding principles with little recourse to law or policies about what, how and where to build. Further, it is materially engaged; accordingly, local building styles and techniques specific even to West Wales have been developed.

This chapter starts by introducing the distinctive policy context for low-impact dwelling: One Planet Development (OPD), the unique approach to development spearheaded by the Welsh Assembly Government. It draws out the elements that differentiate self-build under OPD – and its formal and informal precursors – from more normative forms of housing procurement. The chapter continues with an examination of the literature, which shows the extent to which theoretical approaches and empirical research on housing have sidestepped the question of self-building. Indeed, the focus of housing research on the property market as a vehicle for capital overshadows the possibility of examining how self-build may be pursued outside of the market, either through choice or because of lack of access to this market, as was clear in the early work on plotlanders (Hardy and Ward, 2003). In revisiting, through the perspective of self-building, the question of how we might understand housing, I draw on anthropological conceptualisations of houses and households that extend beyond the limited model of exchange value that proliferates in other areas of housing research to a consideration of their symbolic, material and social significance. In so doing, I am inspired by anthropological approaches that privilege provisioning, which focus on the social relations involved in production, distribution, circulation and consumption (Narotzky, 2005).

Through an ethnographic perspective on low-impact, autonomous dwellings in the eco-village of Y Mynydd,[1] I reveal the complex values and relations at the heart of the constitution of the village and how these are reproduced. In this way, I reveal how self-build allows a range of values extending beyond mere exchange value to be accumulated in the house and its very fabric and argue for an approach to self-build housing that focuses on how provisioning shapes what sort of dwelling is possible.

One Planet Development: a self-build policy

My research coincided with the emergence of a new policy context for living off-grid in Wales. *One Wales: One Planet* was the 2009 sustainability strategy written by the devolved Welsh Assembly Government. The strategy outlines Wales's aspiration to reduce CO_2 emissions, and for Wales to consume only its fair share of planetary resources within the lifetime of a generation. Nominally, *One Wales: One Planet* is a standard 'sustainable development' strategy, and therefore open to the same sorts of critique (Alexander, 2005; Doyle, 1998), but it is markedly different in two important ways. First, it moves away from the offsetting model that

dominates both carbon culture (Dalsgaard, 2013) and planning (Hannis and Sullivan, 2012), setting Wales's spatial planning agenda on a different trajectory from that adopted by its neighbour, England. Second, *One Wales: One Planet* includes a rare policy context for living off-grid, under the rubric 'One Planet Development' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010).

OPD is one of the first workable policy contexts promoting self-build. While there is nothing explicitly about self-build in the OPD practice guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2012), several features of the policy mean that OPD is a self-build policy in all but name. Such features include the linking of work and income to land-based businesses, the requirement to meet the standards of an environmental footprinting analysis, and the need for buildings to be zero carbon in construction and everyday use – all of which create design peculiarities that favour self-build as a mode of development. Every OPD development to date has been self-built and sits firmly within the extended definition of self-build provided by Benson and Hamiduddin in the introduction to this volume.

According to the advocacy group One Planet Council (n.d.), ten developments have proceeded which follow the rubric of OPD, with a further six known to be in the planning stages. This number is now growing at a much faster rate at the time of writing than at any other time since the policy's inception. OPD practitioners acknowledge that the policy is rigorous and ties them to exacting management and reporting standards (Jennings, 2015). Presently, however, there is a growing uptake in OPD applications despite its complexity and the perceived hardship of 'going back to the land'.

OPD: local and traditional antecedents

OPD policy did not emerge in a void; it has precursors in policy, and builds on a tradition of eco-building in rural Wales. Low-impact dwelling has historic and traditional roots in Wales. For example, Ward (2002) describes the folkloric *ty un nos* (one-night house). It was believed that if a householder could erect a dwelling on manorial wastes over a single night, with smoke emanating from a chimney by morning, then they would be entitled to keep the dwelling and whatever land fell between the dwelling and the landing place of an axe launched from the doorstep. To some extent, the idea that the right to build a *ty un nos* was an unwritten law was still current in West Wales during fieldwork.

The informal development that was an occasional feature of the rural hinterland can also be considered as paving the way for off-grid

living and the uptake of OPD. Such informal development was fairly common practice in the wider 'alternative community' resident in West Wales, composed of populations of downshifters, those choosing to go 'back-to-the-land', families and groups that date back two to three generations. Some informal developments had gained retrospective planning permission over time. However, there have been several planning battles over their legality, with dwellers favouring what are perceived to be natural, cheap or locally sourced materials over strict adherence to building, and certainly planning, regulations.

OPD had forerunners in the form of two Pembrokeshire County Council planning policies. Known as Policy 47 and, latterly, Policy 52 (PCC, 2006), these policies promoted 'low-impact development' in rural areas. At the time of writing, two developments have been built under Policy 52, including Tir y Gafel, also known as Lammas eco-village, the first permitted eco-village in Wales. The numerous other self-built homes in eco-villages in the area are characterised as illicit rural developments. As the former Welsh Assembly Government environment minister Jane Davidson explained to me during an interview, it was Lammas's difficulty in getting planning permission that spurred the inclusion of OPD in *One Wales: One Planet*.

Self-build housing: beyond production and consumption

In trying to widen the concept of consumption to include affective labour, Miller argued that, for the UK, '[s]elf-built housing, despite its political appeal, is never likely to be more than a minority possibility, unless we want to renew the housing stock at very short intervals' (1988, 354). Today, however, UK self-build needs to be considered afresh – not least because the idea of any renewal of the housing stock now seems very unlikely, and partly as a result of the current housing crisis in London and the southeast (see also Benson and Hamiduddin; Heffernan, this volume).

The deeply ingrained, market-oriented view of housing typical of the UK is evident in Marxist approaches to housing and housebuilding, which couple housing to processes of accumulation at different scales. Harvey has used the term 'spatio-temporal fix' to describe the process of unlocking the fixed capital embedded in the built environment to address crises of over-accumulation, and describes how property markets play a particularly significant role in this process (2004, 65). Where self-building

is more commonplace, however, a different picture emerges. Duncan and Rowe (1993) note that self-build is a major form of housing supply in Western Europe, which stabilises the housing market, as well as ensuring greater long-term efficiency and quality of homes. Development by self-build cannot therefore be regarded as a sort of material repository for the large-scale hoarding of capital. By contrast to homes procured through the housing market – a typical example of commodity fetishism wherein the human role in producing commodities is obscured by the anonymity of consumption through the market (Bloch and Parry, 1989; Narotzky, 1997; Graeber, 2001) – self-built homes exemplify, rather than obscure, the links between production and consumption.

Self-built housing is not always a consumer choice in a market-context. Housing research tends to accept this idea more readily for contexts outside of the Global North (e.g. Balchin and Stewart, 2001), and while anthropological literature indicates numerous examples of people and places where self-building is presented as the only conceivable option – from the Favelas of Sao Paulo (Holston, 2007) to the villages of Madagascar (Bloch, 1995, 1998) – it appears that anthropologists have not been overly concerned to account for the 'why' of self-building; where it occurs, it has typically been taken for granted. The resulting assumption is that self-build occurs due to either the absence or the withdrawal of financial markets, or indeed the ontological separateness of housing and capital.

In contrast, research focused more fixedly on housing clarifies that this is not really the case, as self-building is an integral and substantial aspect of many stable housing markets. In Japan, for example, house-building is an occasion that not only demands elaborate rituals (Hendry, 1999, 2003) but, while not commonly referred to as self-build, does fit the extended definition of self-build given in this volume since most homes are at least customised (Patchell, 2002). What the anthropological literature about houses and homes reveals more clearly, however, are some of the social and symbolic meanings behind building and dwelling, occupational practices that are intimately connected to the practice of self-building.

Households: houses to dwell in

Carsten and Hugh-Jones's volume *About the House* (1995), revisits Levi-Strauss's notion of house societies, an analytical stepping-stone between kin- and state-based societies, wherein the house itself is a timeless metaphor for belonging. As a corporate body, the house – rather than its

inhabitants – is capable of owning and mobilising resources. This attention to the house as an analytical unit in its own right perhaps sidesteps the question of how houses are materially produced. At least in anthropological terms, the house has characteristically been a site of contradiction as it absorbs and reconfigures many of the tensions between structure and agency that its inhabitants negotiate on an everyday basis. Furthermore, this sort of analysis of the house contains a contradiction between the timelessness of the house's symbolism and the dynamism of its interactions with state and society more broadly. Certainly, though, the distinction between buildings and the people and activities they contain might be somewhat blurred.

Bloch tells us that the Zafimaniry 'mental model of a house' is a process of maturation (1998, 34), as the process of building a family home is intimately linked to the lifecourses of Zafimaniry villagers, particularly marriage. Flimsy bamboo houses are quickly thrown up by sons prior to marriage; if it looks to be a good match, the formalisation of the house is initiated. Once the house is equipped with a hearth and a central post the new wife can move in. As the marriage consolidates over time, so too does the house, as it is gradually reinforced with more durable, permanent materials; over time, the wood of the house is carved in relief with intricately detailed images symbolising the strengthening of the house and the marriage itself (Bloch, 1998). Houses are, to the Zafimaniry, not only representative of, but also a factor in marriage; without marriage, houses would be inconceivable.

In Bloch's example, houses are indivisible from other social institutions. In Pine's (1996) description of the Gorale house, the house is shown to have its own agency. The Gorale house is a metaphor for kinship that also maintains a shifting power relationship with the state in which the house is ideologically held to be economically dominant despite its actual economic significance. As well as this ideological position, the Gorale house commands a set of elaborate rituals that tie the members of the house both to the house as symbol and to the fabric of the house itself. The Gorale house is also a cultural repository and an agent in recruiting new members and perpetuating its social importance (Pine, 1996, 448).

Houses or dwellings thus become spaces for the process of occupation; that is, dwelling. Dwelling, in the Heideggerian sense proposed by Ingold's (1995) phenomenology of the environment, provides a useful framework for understanding the distinction I wish to draw between different forms of housing procurement: unlike a housing development, a self-built dwelling might not be primarily a vessel for accumulation in

the strictest sense. In addition to adopting this more fluid notion of dwelling, my research into low-impact, autonomous households stresses that household is not an end in itself; rather, *it is a lens through which to view processes of production, consumption and reproduction*. Therefore, this chapter considers the interplay between self-build and households.

In conceptualising household as a process, Souvatzi (2008) emphasises that a key challenge is to construct a flexible analytical notion of household that can accommodate both the diversity of forms which households take and local conceptualisations about households. Importantly, household does not map neatly onto co-residential groups or the nuclear family, requiring a broader notion of household perhaps more akin to historic or classical household configurations, such as the idealised self-sufficient household described by Aristotle in *Oeconomicus*. The narrowly defined UK household that maps very closely on to the nuclear family is a fairly recent cultural model produced by post-war social trends that saw families begin to move away from intergenerational households into nuclear family-only dwellings (Young and Wilmott, 1986; Rosser and Harries, 1965).

In my research field, self-building was both a choice and a necessity for the households I encountered, and self-building allowed a fluid approach to dwelling that could react to the ebb and flow of household composition. Sharing a direct genealogical link with the cultures of resistance that McKay (1996) has documented since the 1960s, the evolving back-to-the-land movement (Halfacree, 2006) and the kind of new social movements critiqued by Day (2005), the sort of self-build practices that I encountered engaged the material world in a critical process of making and building houses and households as a form of environmental activism; the sort of 'everyday activism' described by Chatterton and Pickerill (2010). This sort of passive activism relied on not going out, on not making an impact on the world, but rather, to quote one research participant, 'staying at home and setting a good example'. While undoubtedly it was cheaper to develop a self-built eco-home informally, money was far from the only factor that motivated the decision to self-build.

Autonomous, invisible, impermanent: ethnography off-grid in West Wales

Ethnographic research at eco-villages and with low-impact, autonomous households was conducted primarily over a period of 18 months between 2010 and 2011 and has been augmented by
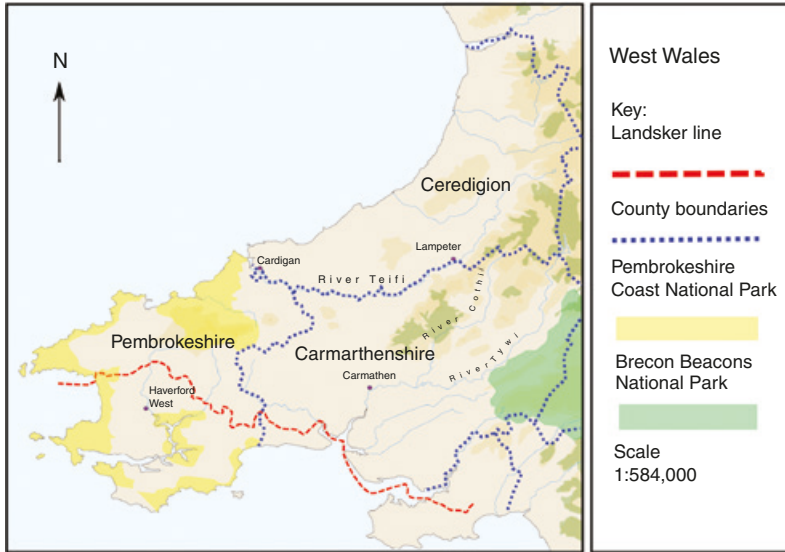
Figure 5.1   West Wales Map (© Elaine Forde)

subsequent field visits. The policy context discussed in the introduction was, at the time of fieldwork, so new as to have made almost no discernible impact on the research field, though since then the idea of low-impact self-building in this region has gained greater traction. I have argued elsewhere (Forde, 2016) that important precursors to the OPD policy already existed in eco-villages in west Wales and in other parts of Wales and rural UK regions. The region commonly referred to as West Wales (Figure 5.1) is a rural area that loosely maps on to the administrative region of Dyfed.

West Wales is a rural region, with a local economy based largely on farming (Hutson, 2003) and tourism. It is culturally and linguistically distinct (James, 2003; Williams, 2003), with a high proportion of first-language Welsh speakers compared to other regions of Wales. This area has seen a steady rise in inward migration largely by English populations (James, 2003). Williams has noted that there is a link between inward migration to rural Pembrokeshire and people that she refers to as 'alternatives' (2003, 153). My research also indicates that the combined factors of the availability of farmland and an interest in Wales's 'Celtic' heritage have contributed to the significant inward migration to the region, particularly green lifestyle migration. Accordingly, there are many types of eco-villages in the area, and no shortage of examples

of people living in small-scale, self-built homes, off-grid and often invisibly.

My ethnography of autonomous dwelling in West Wales is primarily based on participant observation and semi-structured interviewing at a long-standing off-grid eco-village in Ceredigion (which I have given the pseudonym Y Mynydd) that had been established in embryonic form in the late 1970s. For the initial fieldwork, I lived at the eco-village in an old bus converted for living in, and later in a small roundhouse. I participated in everyday life at the eco-village, though it must be stressed that the group, such as it was, did not regard itself as a community in the rather loaded sense that the term tends to be used in the eco-village world. Almost no communal activities or provisioning took place on a regular basis; further, a defining feature of Y Mynydd was that there was no discernible group administrative structure such as a committee that acted to make decisions about the eco-village. The village seemed to exist on a single principle, which was 'to live with nature as part of nature', and that was the key guidance that newcomers such as myself were given about how to get along in the village. Copying what others did, or at least not trying to do anything radically out of the ordinary, seemed to be the best way to get along.

From my position at Y Mynydd, I gathered research participants from a much wider network. Field visits to other eco-villages – such as the new village Tir y Gafel and other off-grid households – were informed by participant observation at Y Mynydd. This meant that I had established a sort of baseline model of living autonomously from which to compare and contrast other approaches, looking for commonalities and divergences. My research findings suggested that those living in low-impact, autonomous dwellings pursued one of two courses: (a) either they radically changed their consumption habits, significantly lowering their reliance on external structures, engaging in less wage labour and producing more at home; or (b) they followed a middle ground characterised by green technologies, maintaining a degree of consumption and production – particularly of home-made goods for sale – that enabled a normative standard of living, albeit with a low ecological footprint. In both cases, self-building a home was a key imperative; it was rare to encounter somebody living off-grid who had not also self-built. Given that building and home maintenance were key provisioning activities, particularly in the new eco-village, I was given several opportunities to volunteer on eco-build projects, which provided experiences that directly fed my research.

Building homes and growing households: DIY self-build in practice

Problematising household as being neither a kin-based unit nor strictly about co-residence, this chapter's focus on households in the eco-self-build context reveals that household is a performative process. As a significant locus for a shifting interplay between formal and informal economies, I examine how labour is mobilised to and by households, I explore the more symbolic performance of an extended household, and discuss the potential for self-build housing to reproduce particular values.

Self-building and mobilising labour

Before starting fieldwork, I was aware that most eco-villages recruit volunteer labour for eco-building projects. This concept is not entirely exclusive to the eco-village context; indeed, seasonal volunteer labour underpinned a 1970s utopian-socialist movement, the Israeli kibbutzim described by Bowes (1980). Labour is volunteered for the good of the 'house' itself, without any direct reciprocation. The 'house', or at least the land, is an agent in the mobilisation of labour, extending across and drawing from very extensive networks. Just as in Bowes's kibbutz example, which drew volunteers from across the world, the key organisation for matching volunteers to eco-villages, co-ops and individual households, Willing Workers on Organic Farms (WWOOF), is an international organisation. The process of considering the idea that it is the 'house' itself that has agency to recruit people demands that we take a broader view of houses as purely material forms. From this vantage point houses are social entities; as economic actors, they mobilise an impressive array of resources to them through porous household boundaries.

I found that volunteering was commonplace. For example, the new eco-village Tir y Gafel embraced volunteer labour; because of its status as the only lawfully permitted eco-village development in the UK at that time, the interest from the broader green activist community was channelled into volunteering opportunities. Some of the initial dwellings at the eco-village had been built very quickly with volunteer labour, and much of that was highly skilled. I volunteered at several household plots at Tir y Gafel, including building an extension onto a roundhouse primarily using sacks of rubble as large malleable bricks which were later plastered.

A defining part of the eco-village volunteering process is staying at the household as a member of the household. Such volunteers perform

labour in exchange for nothing more than the fleeting experience of being part of the household, a factor which unsettles the idea of productivism as it integrates work with sociality. A co-volunteer, Ben, who was a tree surgeon by trade, was delighted to offer his services felling trees from the communal woodland for an upcoming building project at the village. Ben described his time there as 'a busman's holiday', but it was clear that he relished the opportunity to be involved.

However, the ethics of volunteer labour were not always agreed upon. Harkness (2009) notes a similar attitude amongst Earthship dwellers towards the practice of recruiting volunteers to work on commissioned Earthships in New Mexico. Volunteer labour was considered acceptable, but not in the context of commercial gain (Harkness, 2009, 197). Given the wider reliance of eco-building on volunteer labour, it is peculiar that there were no formal volunteering opportunities at Y Mynydd. It was the generally held consensus that if a person needed help from others, they would reciprocate more directly. It was also the generally held view that if someone needed extra help, they were likely overstretching, trying to occupy too much of the shared land. While some residents at times recruited helpers, others staunchly refused any offers of help. Bruce, who had been resident at Y Mynydd for nearly 30 years, complained bitterly about visitors to Y Mynydd asking if he needed any help, particularly in his lovingly tended garden: 'They wouldn't approach an artist to offer him help with a painting!' It was the case, however, that he had recruited help from his sons, his own extended household, for his latest building project.

The hungry household

I regularly encountered households consisting of several individuals, from members of the same nuclear family, half-siblings or step-families to more distant or even unrelated, in the normative sense, kin. Such households comprised up to five of what research participants called *spaces*, small and simple and usually self-built (where possible) shelters such as yurts, huts, cabins, trailers, statics or even tipis. I began to understand that household, at least in that context, really corresponded to kitchen, or what might more generally be termed the hearth, as discrete household units could be discerned primarily as they ate together on an everyday basis, rather than by other possible indicators such as relatedness (Carsten, 2000).

Souvatzi notes how critical the ritualised sharing of food is for reproducing the household, and how that practice is materially embedded in

the form of the shared hearth or kitchen (2008, 16). For those living in low-impact autonomous dwellings, the kitchen or hearth are the spaces through which the household coalesces symbolically. As Sargisson (2000) notes of intentional communities, shared meals are commonplace (see also Field, this volume). Indeed, the frequency of shared meals indicates much about the politics of the group, whether it is co-operative (regular and frequent meals), communal (everyday shared meals) or otherwise (random, meals in response to extraordinary circumstances).

The following ethnographic vignette describes a shared meal that took place in the 'big lodge' – a large tipi – at Y Mynydd in March 2011. The big lodge was the place where newcomers tended to stay and live together as a household before deciding whether to stay at Y Mynydd, or to move on. It was also the symbolic hearth of the village and the scene of more intimate village get-togethers. Shared meals often took place in the big lodge, but were not regular, a way to affirm community by emulating the key locus of household organisation, the shared kitchen or hearth.

> I had already been told that there would be a shared meal in the big lodge, as a get-together, but also to fundraise for the land fund, so when I heard the conch shell blowing at about 7.30 pm I knew it was time to grab a plate a cup and some cutlery – and a decent log – and to head over to the village fields. I could smell the fire and see the shadows flickering in the big lodge as I approached, as well as hearing the hubbub inside. There were different kids darting around in and out of the door, and especially behind the lining. I shook my wellies off leaving them to fate in the huge pile of boots by the door and stepped in. The floor of the big lodge was covered with a thick layer of reeds (called reeds, but actually rushes), dry and surprisingly pleasant to walk on. There was an enormous circle of people sitting round a huge merry fire (not the three-log type for day-to-day tipi use, but a huge social fire giving warmth and light to the lodge) and I could hear the clinking and clatter of about 50 plates and cups as people chatted, kids howled and everyone waited for the meal to be served. The meal consisted of rice and dahl with onion bhajis, a massive amount of food based around three gigantic cooking pans.
>
> This part goes by in a blur as it consists of passing a plate round in rough sequential circle order right to left (based on kitchen position), getting it back piled with food, then tucking in. Kids were served first, then adults, then seconds dished out, then pudding (cake and custard)

to kids, then adults, then pudding-seconds. Later, more seconds were eaten, then it was a free-for-all until the food/everyone was gone – tonight the food went first.

By the time the meal was over the Magic Hat was passed round for donations – to the land fund – but this was by no means compulsory or always given. Nowadays, alcohol is enjoyed – sometimes copiously – in the big lodge, although this was not always the case. This evening, drink and song started flowing after the meal as kids started to disappear to be replaced by drums and the odd bottle of whisky. I played the tambourine until my shoulder hurt … It was during this time that I noticed the visitors to the big lodge, two Cardiff University students, girls who had found the place on the internet and had come for a look. The night ended at around dawn, with a drunken old posse keeping the poor students awake and pretty tired-looking by the time I sloped off near to 5 am. I heard that someone had wandered into a hedge on their way home, only to be pulled out by one of the students.

In this account, a shared meal takes place in Y Mynydd's communal space, a large tipi that had been handmade by people from the village. As household ordering at Y Mynydd centres on kitchens, the momentary shared kitchen at the big lodge meal brings the village together as one household, even fleetingly. The simplicity but effectiveness of the tipi structure, which as a self-built home consists literally of a pile of suitable sticks with a canvas cover, is a perfect juxtaposition to the intricate relationships of the extended household that it contains.

Self-build, reproducing values

The most commonplace form of self-build housing I encountered in the field was the turf-roofed roundhouse. These squat, roundwood timber framed huts shared the same design: a reciprocal roof that seemed to float above a wooden henge. Constructed with the aid of either a scaffold or high upright post which is later removed, a reciprocal roof consists of long rafters which rest on each other, each on its neighbour and supporting its neighbour as they twist around a central circle. This design – now so prevalent in eco-villages – served as the perfect analogy for the rhetoric of community-building that many eco-villages represent. Self-building is therefore a factor in the reproduction of households, in turn reproducing certain social values. Like the reciprocal roof, the simple but spacious big lodge is symbolic of village life at Y Mynydd. Newcomers

Figure 5.2   The framework for a reciprocal roof (© Elaine Forde)

and visitors to the village are put up in the big lodge space as a kind of rite of passage; it is also the site of events which affirm – at least symbolically – the extended eco-village as household. Similarly, volunteering at an eco-village sees workers accommodated at one of the households during their stay, during which these extended households engage in the material production of dwellings. Turning these examples back on to the question of what distinguishes self-build from other forms of housing procurement is a matter of understanding what values are reproduced by these households, a question embedded in the wider cultural context in which such households exist. Unlike the appraisal of normative housing procurement where the key imperative is the accumulation and release of economic value, self-build homes embody a broader range of values; the labour employed in their production and reproduction is borne out of diverse activities of provisioning.

Conclusion

Through an analysis that draws inspiration from the anthropological works on provisioning (see, for example, Graeber, 2001; Narotzky, 2005), I have demonstrated that these self-built low-impact autonomous

dwellings represent a form of housing provision that runs counter to normative housing in several key ways. This takes as a starting point a focus on social relations rather than production and consumption – as is predominant in other forms of housing research – and what this can reveal about the significance of the eco-village as dwelling (Ingold, 1995), as household, and the reproduction of values at its heart. From the volunteer labour involved in eco-building – drawn from a wider community of those with shared values for nature, non-normative dwelling practices and the environment – to the shared hearth of the eco-village as household, eco-self-building reveals provisioning at work. Within this, the self-built home is not merely a vessel for shelter, but is an active agent in its own constitution. Though it provides shelter and space for the activities of a household, it also necessitates and mobilises relations of production and consumption, exercising agency in this process. As such, the self-built home may respond to the present and perceived future needs of its residents, even in the first instance defining much of what those needs are.

As the brief anthropological examples demonstrate, what we call self-build takes place in a variety of contexts; it assumes prominence in contexts where market forms of housing procurement are absent. It is caught up in systems of kinship and social reproduction, ripe with meaning and significance about home, housing and household; it both structures and is structured by what it means to dwell in a particular cultural context, with social values and relations at its heart. What self-build offers is a unique lens through which to think again about housing as a form of provision, shifting our gaze from the focus on the market, and production and consumption therein. Self-build, then, as a form of housing provision, might offer an alternative for those seeking housing and households that embed different values and relations from those embedded in mainstream housing provision.

Acknowledgements

6

Protohome: rethinking home through co-production

Julia Heslop

Protohome[1] is a collaboratively built housing project which was temporarily sited in Newcastle upon Tyne from May to August 2016. The project involved a partnership between Crisis, the national charity for single homelessness, xsite architecture and TILT Workshop. It forms part of a research project by Julia Heslop.

Between February and May 2016, Heslop and TILT worked with members of Crisis – individuals who are homeless, have been homeless in the last two years or are at risk of homelessness – two half-days a week, to train them in woodwork and design skills. Individuals also acquired qualifications. The group collectively constructed a housing prototype (4.8 metres × 9.6 metres), which was built both in Crisis's wood workshop and on-site. Protohome is a test, a prototype, it is a 'shell' of a building without insulation or services, but shows the potential to be extended into 'working' housing after the project.

Protohome opened to the public for 11 weeks and exhibited the documentation of the project as well as hosting a range of events – including film screenings, artist residencies, public forums, workshops, talks and performances – examining issues of housing crisis, homelessness, austerity, the politics of land and development, and participatory alternatives.

Housing and austerity

This is a story firmly embedded within the context of austerity Britain, within the cuts and market crashes, within an atmosphere of uncertainty,

where projected futures are gone, where the post-war welfare consensus fragments. Housing has been at the forefront of this crisis. It has simultaneously *constructed* the crisis (through the sub-prime mortgage market, drenched in debt and cheap credit); been *structured by it* (through tougher mortgage regulations, the selling and demolishing of social housing and a stagnant housebuilding sector); and been posited as *a way out* of crisis (through boosting building, lending and buying). The housing market is now bound up so tightly with national economic stability that the government continues to look to home ownership and new housebuilding as a solution both to the economic crisis and the growing housing crisis (a crisis that is both *real* – having specific felt outcomes, as in the case of people living in precarious housing circumstances – and *socially constructed*, even if ambiguous or contested) (Madden and Marcuse, 2016), without tackling the root causes of housing poverty or inequality. Successive governments have designed policy to 'get the market moving' and incentivise large-scale housebuilders through huge government subsidies, which have in turn created a superficial housing market (Dorling, 2014, 7).

As a result, we are left with an 'impression of stability' (Dorling, 2014, 8), whilst government intervention continues to nurture boom-and-bust cycles. This is exacerbated by developers who are not driven by meeting housing need; instead, they sit on land and watch prices rise, drip-feeding housing to keep prices buoyant – demand should always exceed supply, the market must not be flooded. Thus, the logic is so often *not to build* (Dorling, 2014; Madden and Marcuse, 2016).

Whilst social housing was never designed to be universal – seemingly the 'wobbly pillar' (Torgersen, 1987) of the welfare state – nowhere can we see the retrenchment and residualisation of welfare and the 'roll out' of new opportunities for capital more prominently than in housing (Hodkinson and Robbins, 2012). Flint defines this new moment of welfare reform as 'the articulation of new forms of social contract enacted through housing' (2015, 41), whereby the splintering and reconfiguring of the welfare state and the reciprocal agreement between state and society has been mobilised by the government *itself*. With government policy focused on widening owner-occupation at the expense of the social housing sector (see the 2016 Housing and Planning Act), coupled with welfare reform and austerity policies, the housing precariat is now a wide-ranging group. There are nearly two million people on the social housing waiting list nationally (GMB, 2014) and a lack of regulation in private renting, meaning that bad quality and overpriced housing is often given to poor people. Furthermore, Crisis reported that rough sleeping in

England doubled between 2010 and 2015, whilst placements in temporary accommodation have increased by 40 per cent in the same period, and two thirds of local authorities reported that welfare reform was directly responsible for rising homelessness in their area (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). So often considered in relation to family breakdown, a lack of social networks, drug, alcohol and mental health problems, the relationship between housing policy, welfare reform, property relations and precarious lives is becoming increasingly clear. As the Protohome project has uncovered, the economic pain inflicted as a result of cuts and caps often falls at the feet of individuals least able to cope: the sick, the disabled, the old and the homeless. The effects of austerity thus become individualised through increasing conditionalities placed on welfare and the drive towards citizen responsibilisation.

In addition, even where welfare institutions exist, they are at once sources of security and freedom and instruments of social control, thoroughly permeated by paternalism. Discussions in the Protohome workshop were often about long meetings at the Jobcentre, employability courses, threats of sanctions, unpaid benefit – in effect, the 'social contract' now performing as a mechanism of control (see also Collins, this volume). One of our members stated:

> It's about targets and it's about suppression and it's about making you get to the end of your tether, so … that you don't sign … the hardest … the horriblest job I've ever had in my life is being on the dole 'cause they've changed all the goalposts.

The contractual and reciprocal relationship between giver and receiver is increasingly under the power of the state. The conflicts that might once have been (or attempted to have been) mitigated through the welfare state are now individualised and internalised, shifted into the domains of the psychological and the bodily (Habermas, 1992).

Yet, in recognising that the lives of the homeless are often controlled and regulated by the state, by the benefit system, by the criminal justice system, we also need to recognise agency. Homelessness cannot be rationalised by pathological explanations. The homeless person is not a sick patient (Cloke et al., 2010; May and Cloke, 2013; Jackson, 2015). And whilst, through the lens of austerity, we can witness new geographies of exclusion and corporeal survival and how new emotional and material landscapes of 'otherness' have opened up – such as the rise of punitive measures for begging and rough sleeping in urban centres – during this project we also recognised elements of care and compassion: a hand on

the shoulder; the words, 'Are you OK?'; accompanying someone home; networks of mutual support, of friendship and safety testifying to how solidarity grows in marginal spaces. Where there is punitive state control, there are also tentative spaces of humanity, spaces where social networks are founded and developed, where, instead of being expelled from urban space, people can exercise control over it.

Participation and crisis

The Protohome project drew on this context to examine how self-provided housing, produced outside of the state and the market, could offer an educational and capacity-building opportunity for those in precarious housing circumstances. Within an austerity context, the concept and practice of participation in housing needs to be reclaimed. All too often a celebration or promotion of self-build housing coincides with a crisis of capitalism, promoted by a Conservative government (Duncan and Rowe, 1993; see also Benson and Hamiduddin, this volume). As a result, critics have suggested that the use of participation can be a reactionary process of crisis management through which notions of 'community', 'localism', 'collaboration' and 'empowerment' are *used* by governments to 'off-load' or transfer state responsibilities and resources to the community/voluntary sectors and then onto individual households (Fiori and Ramirez, 1992; Healey, 1997; Mohan and Stokke, 2000; Berner and Phillips, 2005). Costs are cut and efficiency savings are made through the time, labour and often money of volunteers (Mayo and Craig, 1995; Cleaver, 1999). We can see this 'turn to the community' in the Coalition government's 2011 Localism Act, which promised a radical shift of power from the state to individuals and communities. The Act included measures specifically aimed at citizen participation in housing and planning, such as the Community Right to Build and neighbourhood planning. David Cameron wrote that a bloated, domineering and costly state had 'crowded out social action and eroded social responsibility' (Conservative Party, 2009, 3); therefore, the state must be weakened, thinned down, hollowed out, to make way for what was to be the rather elusive 'Big Society'.

But there have been huge socio-spatial differences to the take-up of the powers on offer from the Localism Act and inevitably poor, urban communities less able or equipped (lacking monetary or social resources) have been excluded (Barritt, 2012). This chimes with the rather homogeneous, closed notions of community invoked through 'Big Society' rhetoric, which arguably draws upon 'long-standing Conservative traditions

of middle-class voluntarism and social responsibility' (Featherstone et al., 2012, 178). What we are witnessing is more akin to what Featherstone et al. (2012, 178) label 'austerity localism', 'the latest mutation of neo-liberalism', where the promotion of 'active citizenship' and citizen responsibilisation is at the expense of the hollowing-out of the local state (Stoker, 2010; Featherstone et al., 2012; Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012). This is part of a wider responsibilisation process that has emerged through austerity, which often includes a heavy dose of moralising, as one of the Protohome group members highlighted: 'I've got the whole alarm bells going off in my head, you're a scrounger, a waster, you're on the dole, you're in a hostel, get yourself a job.' The localism agenda does not therefore seek to capacity-build within communities that may benefit most from participation, groups whose lives are framed through many crises, whether these be related to health, money, skills, work, food or housing.

The Protohome project uses this context to think through alternative approaches for a coming post-(state-)welfare era in housing. This story tracks narratives of falling through the net (because the net has gaping holes in it), and examines how embedded processes of mutual self-help in housing may aid in thinking *beyond* the welfare state and allow capacity-building for those in precarious housing circumstances. But considering how participation has been *used* by the state as a process of citizen responsibilisation, can participation be reclaimed through a renewed focus on the *ethics* of participation? Whilst individual self-build can be socially divisive, often failing to address wider housing need and being difficult to scale up (Ward, 1982; Mathéy, 1992), could collective, non-exclusive self-provided housing for people in real need of a home and with a strong connection to a social or political movement forge new ways of thinking about housing?

Participatory housing

Both the terms 'self-help' and 'self-build' inadequately describe the Protohome project, which is a collective build project undertaken by people in need of a home and/or employment. It has therefore been useful to draw upon understandings of the growing self-provided (and often informal) housing sector in the Global South and Eastern Europe. Whilst apocalyptic accounts of growing slum populations are common (see Davis, 2007), there are now more varied attitudes towards these self-provided housing processes, some of which are uncritically celebratory

Figure 6.1   Protohome (© Julia Heslop)

(see de Soto, 2000; Neuwirth, 2006), and some of which recognise the agency of dwellers *as well as* their dire need, but also draw attention to the wider structural (political and economic) factors that have prompted such large-scale self-help housing measures (see Roy and Alsayyad, 2004; Roy, 2011; Amin, 2013; McGuirk, 2014). These last accounts help in understanding how housing connects to wider community-building approaches, such as cultural practices, for example through vernacular building traditions (Kellett and Napier, 1995; Kellett, 2011), political movements (Bayat, 2004; Pieterse, 2008; Simone, 2010) or household economies (Tipple, 1993).

In particular, the work of the architect John Turner, who worked for many years in informal settlements in Latin America, was useful for Protohome. Turner believed that Western/Global North nations had forgotten the basic resources of housebuilding. Removing dwellers from the decision-making process of their housing alienated them from the end product, this alienation rendering dwellers less interested in investing in, maintaining and paying for this housing (Turner, 1977, 1141). He therefore emphasised the limitations of state and market-based housing solutions, writing that, 'Only too well do we know that "solutions" to "housing problems" often generate yet more and even worse problems' (1996, 339). He believed that housing was best built and managed by those who are to live in it, so that it reflects the culture *of* a place, not (generic) culture *in* a place.

With this in mind, and drawing on the fields of participatory development in both the Global North and South (Chambers, 1997; Mohan and Stokke, 2000; Mohan, 2008; Gallent and Ciaffi, 2014) and participatory research (Freire, 1970; Fals-Borda and Rahman, 1991; McIntyre, 2008; Kindon et al., 2007), I have named Protohome a *participatory housing* project. My use of participatory housing at once (a) refers to the full build of a house by people that need a home and training/employment opportunities and (b) privileges an ethical approach to housing that attempts to work within a relatively hierarchy-free structure, aiming to redistribute power and give wider access to resources for builders. In this sense, it is heavily influenced by the philosophy of participatory action research (PAR):

> a form of knowledge co-production that involves partners working together to examine a problem with the goal of improving it for the better. PAR involves a political and ethical commitment to challenging social hierarchies – both in how research is done, and in ensuring that beneficial outcomes result for those with least power in society. (Pain et al., 2016, 4)

PAR is therefore research/work that is done *with* people, not *on* them. It involves the co-production of knowledge and seeks to enable people traditionally regarded as excluded or disadvantaged to have a voice. PAR offers the possibility of empowerment for participants. Accordingly, what the Protohome project sought to uncover was how designing, building and learning can be a tool for more embedded forms of capacity- and confidence-building, and how it can help create social ties for people in most need.

Methodology

The Segal system

Participatory build was one strategy through which this project mobilised more democratic structures for the creation and management of housing at its core. We used the Segal system of self-building – an alternative to the 'one-size-fits-all' approach of mass housing solutions – which addresses the challenges of financing homes for low-income groups. It is extremely affordable (a two-bedroom house can be built for around £60,000, not including the cost of the land) and simple to construct. Walter Segal was an architect who developed a system of self-build

housing specifically designed for untrained self-builders. While rebuilding his family home, he built a temporary structure in his garden using standard cladding materials and with no foundations other than paving slabs. It took two weeks to build and cost £800. He felt that this house was more interesting than the family home he eventually built, and so went on to develop this through a series of council-led self-build schemes in Lewisham, London in the 1970s.

The concept behind the Segal system is that, in the words of our joiner, 'with very limited tools we can build something quite substantial … just with a saw and a chisel … that's how they've done it for thousands of years'. The system uses standard component sizes and easy jointing techniques, opening up self-build to those who are cash-poor and time-rich. The use of a core timber frame structure, which is erected like a barn raising, means that the walls and partitions are not load bearing, so the 'infill' can be done incrementally over time. This infill is completed using modular panel walls held in place by wooden batons that can easily be unscrewed and moved around to change room formations or even to make additions. Segal houses can change and grow as needs change, with families or household economies. As a result, this system really makes self-building achievable – we erected Protohome in two weeks – even for those without any previous woodwork skills. It also offers an approach through which learning can occur while building.

Figure 6.2   Walter's Way, Lewisham (© Julia Heslop)

The form and aesthetic of Protohome emerged from a process of learning, adapting, developing and gradually crafting a structure out of the labours of differently skilled individuals. Thus, the marks of their learning form the look and shape of the structure. It is a modest structure, but this method of building offers affordability, flexibility and efficiency of build to create truly alterative housing forms in a time when the capacity or desire of local authorities and the government to deliver affordable housing is diminishing. Thus, it may be beneficial to look to more modest building systems that aim to democratise the housebuilding process by using simple components and tools and can create added value, such as training and skills-building opportunities.

'I made that, it wasn't done by a machine': the workshop process

The Protohome workshops took place two half-days a week for 11 weeks with two joiners from TILT Workshop, a sessional tutor from Crisis who was responsible for the documentation of the project, Crisis's woodwork tutor and myself, the project facilitator. We then went on site to build the 'house' for two weeks. Participants learnt basic woodwork skills, undertook qualifications administered by Crisis (which included working with hand tools, health and safety, and lifting and handling) and were introduced to the basic design software SketchUp. When learning techniques, participants undertook small projects such as designing and making the furniture for Protohome; working towards small goals helped to energise the group to develop their skills more efficiently. Many of the members learned more effectively through practice, through tacit, hands-on methods, and so tutors attempted to get participants to *think* and *do* at the same time, using both the expressive qualities of the body *and* the imaginative qualities of the mind (Ingold, 2000; Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000). In this sense, we wanted to create a process in which the practical and the intellectual were mutually embedded; as Sennett (2008, 10) states, 'all skills, even the most abstract, begin as bodily practices'.

Caring for both tool and material was also important, not only because we only had a limited amount of material to work with but also to embed an idea of *slow work* into the members, to ensure that they were learning and thinking about their actions every time they put hand to material. These conscientious working practices were important because we had to create a building that was strong, that would withstand potentially bad weather and heavy use. Using hand tools, in line with the

Figure 6.3 The interior of Protohome (© Julia Heslop)

Segal method, allowed a certain kind of autonomy within the build process. Not only did we not need to purchase expensive tools, but we also learned about the physical properties of materials. In the workshop, we discussed the strengths of using hand tools over power tools, and connections between learning and using your hands. One member stated:

> I'd … be quite happy just doing [it] by hand because then you know you've done it and if you keep practising with the hand tool then you've learnt how to make it properly by yourself … you can't really learn how to make a thing properly with a machine 'cause it's going to be perfect every time, but if you use … hand tools you can make it perfect your own way.

We also made group visits, once to a Segal house example. This helped the group to better understand the build process and how the individual building parts worked together to make the whole. The visit acted as a real catalyst for the group, helping to inspire them and boost their confidence prior to the site build.

However, the methodology of the project was not simply approached as a series of practical methods employed systematically, but attempted to uncover many stories and to speak through many voices. Using the philosophy of PAR – collective enquiry and the co-production of knowledge – participants made decisions on the methods and activities used in

the workshops. There was a constant collective cycle of planning, action and reflection (Kesby et al., 2007), through which we could, as a group, analyse what was working and what wasn't and change the course of action accordingly.

Criticism and disagreement were important and we tried to actively highlight and antagonise potentially exploitative or manipulative relationships that occurred either within or through the project, or which frame participants' lives in a wider sense (such as their relationship to the welfare state, or to homeless services). In this sense, regular group and individual discussions were vital. However, it is impossible to remove power relationships completely, and at certain points in the project disagreement and personality clashes did occur.

The professional as enabler

The methodology and system of building we used connected to ideas of self-determination and control and attempted to challenge the dichotomy between the professional and amateur builder. But what then is the role of the professional architect, joiner or builder in this process? There is inevitably a certain 'guarding' of building and designing knowledge in more institutional societies (Kellett and Napier, 1995) and participation

Figure 6.4   Participants making joints in the Crisis workshop (© Julia Heslop)

is often seen as being a threat to professions (Till, 2005, 29). This 'guard-ing' comes in the form of complexity: either the difficulty of communi-cating complex or technical design/build methods, or the *conscious* non-communication of this knowledge (Till, 2005). Often, this is simply because the 'channels of communication' between the 'expert' and the 'amateur-participant' are not well defined and so 'participation remains dominated by the experts who initiate the communication on their own terms, circumscribing the process through professionally coded draw-ings and language' (Till, 2005, 28).

However, the co-production involved in participatory housing pro-jects demands that professionals shift from fixers who focus on problems to enablers who focus on abilities, valorising experience over techno-cratic forms of knowledge.

Throughout the project the tutors tried to critically analyse and break down the distinction between the 'professional joiner/architect' and the 'amateur user'. This was vital to create a participatory build-ing process that was deeply embedded within processes of learning and personal development, where control was key. In keeping with the phil-osophy of PAR, this also required recognising that group members had already embedded areas of knowledge, which may not be directly related to building, but which may still be valuable to draw upon. So, instead of merely imparting knowledge or, to use Paolo Freire's (1970) term, 'banking' knowledge in the learner, the tutor must recognise that already established forms of knowledge exist and are alive in the learner. The new role for the professional 'does not mean the relinquishment of know-ledge, but the redeployment of it in another mode' (Till, 2005, 32), as an enabling force, as a group mediator.

It was therefore important that tutors were not seen as distant pro-fessionals, but instead, with a light-touch, guiding manner, managed to enable members. Horizontal power relations between tutors and par-ticipants were vital, instead of an imbalanced relationship of 'teacher-student'. As one group member stated:

'You're doing it wrong', it's that whole expression. Nobody in the whole time in the Crisis woodshop or in Protohome, nobody once said to me *ever* … 'You're doing it wrong', or 'You're not doing it right' and that is the difference … What Protohome is to me if I had to sum it up in one sentence and Crisis too to be honest, is that it gets rid of your self-limiting beliefs … It gives you the right catalytic environment for you to remember what you felt like as a child, that you could do anything.

The lead joiner expanded the analytical skills of group members by allowing them to assess and change the course of the project and to problem-solve. By leading indirectly, he was always open to how the process could be amended and improved by members. He also taught through trial and error, getting members to learn by doing and by making mistakes. In this sense, there was a certain materiality to the learning process; rather than textual or verbal, it was action-oriented. The success of this teaching methodology was realised when members started teaching each other, highlighting the opportunities for deep learning and capacity building.

The lead joiner also admitted that, 'it's been a learning experience for me as well', indicating that the 'amateur-learner' may also transform the knowledge of the 'expert-tutor' (Mohan, 1999). Ultimately, this focus on the relationship between 'tutor' and 'learner' is about questioning how the development and delivery of housing might be reconfigured, how the distinction between the producers and consumers of housing might be blurred.

It must also be highlighted that within participatory housing projects in-depth support mechanisms are needed. During this project, we had to be especially sensitive to working with people who were perhaps vulnerable, lacked confidence and, in some cases, had deeply embedded issues which had often framed their lives over many years. Each group member had a progression coach at Crisis, who offered information, advice

Figure 6.5   The site build (Photo credit: John Hipkin)

and guidance on appropriate support, monitored members' progression and provided pastoral care, but tutors and other members also informally provided support.

This also meant that it was important that working methods and processes were adaptable to accommodate unforeseen issues. This included a slow lead-in process in the workshop before the site build – a way to both gain woodwork skills and build networks of support and friendship and deep collaboration between project partners (knowing which party/individual is responsible for what and keeping each other informed of progress). Even though the process was slow, the project would have benefitted from more open timescales (we had a deadline to open the building to the public).

As I have indicated, the methodology was aimed at exposing the relationship between knowledge and power, to question 'what knowledge is produced, by whom, for whose interests and towards what end' (Gaventa, 1991, 131); it was about validating the voice of the subaltern or the excluded. As a result, when Protohome opened to the public, the group members presented the project twice: once at a public event and another time to a group of invited housing and architecture professionals, including the Homes and Communities Agency, local council officers and the deputy head of housing at the Greater London Authority. This self-representation was vital, as one group member said, 'it has to come from us'.

Figure 6.6   Protohome open to the public (Photo credit: John Hipkin)

'That social glue'

In practice, the project was about much more than creating a *product* in the form of a prototype house, but was about the *process*, how skills and relationships were created and how they thrived. As one of our members stated:

> I think that's the sign of something good going on … when people are connecting, because when something not right's going on, like problems with mental health or problems with housing or whatever, that's when things fragment or isolate … It's like that social glue.

Similar to Collins's homeless ex-servicemen (this volume), members mentioned that the project aided them to 'have something to get up for in the morning'; 'It's made us want to actually get out and do something'; 'I was always in front of the telly. It's opened the world a bit more for us.' This 'opening-up of the world' through engagement in new activities was a key aspect of the project. This happened not just through hands-on tasks, but also through group discussions over tea and biscuits, about issues that were framing members' lives and beyond, creating a space for critical and also hopeful conversation about futures. It is through these discussions that we saw changes in attitudes, and a certain process of empowerment happening, as members gradually saw their lives from the outside in, and analysed their problems and the reasons for them differently. In some cases, the project opened up a moment of self-discovery after health problems and experiences of homelessness:

> I've realised that I've never put my whole heart into being me and finding out who I am. And this project's changed that, it really has, cos I don't know whether it's the circumstance of being homeless or ill or whatever it is … but I'm starting to think constructively about how I want to shape my life, how I want to be with people and what kind of things I want to be doing.

For some, it was a process of personal realisation – 'It's showing us that I can do what other people are saying I can' – through which self-worth emerged. As one member stated, 'Yesterday I went home and I was knackered and exhausted but I felt this new sense of "I love myself, I value myself".'

Yet attention must also be given to the limits of such projects and the lasting changes they can make in members' lives. After the project, group members might fall back into old routines, former issues might

re-emerge, they might feel lost, self-realisation might be temporary. This is why self-criticism and learning between projects is beneficial, as well as tracing participants after the project to see what lasting impacts have been made.

Moving forward with participatory housing

How can participatory housing projects be scaled up to create permanent homes for people in most need? As Lauren Berlant (2011, 259) suggests, we cannot keep attempting 'to sustain optimism for irreparable objects. The compulsion to repeat a toxic optimism can suture someone or a world to a cramped and unimaginative space of committed replication, *just in case* it will be different.' Thus, the idea that the welfare state will re-emerge under a new guise, will somehow be pieced back together, is no longer realistic. Old certainties, the lack of a sure future, of the 'good life', of social mobility has passed; future security cannot be propped up by ideas of a welfarist past or of future security through the extension of this (Berlant, 2011). Moreover, as in the case of the Protohome members, what if the welfare state does not provide for you or has failed you?

Mutualism

As highlighted above, one of the aims of this project was to examine how housing might be built and managed outside of the state and the market to create more control over housing for low-income groups. As one of our group members stated, 'For me now it's about taking the reins back … I need that control on a situation and I think you lose it when you get into the system'.

To think beyond state provision of housing, Colin Ward's work on mutual aid and resident-controlled housing is useful. Not only did he focus on Britain's more radical history of squatting and occupying land and buildings (Ward, 2002; Hardy and Ward, 1984), he also discussed the important role that housing co-operatives and other mutual aid organisations played in the past, noting that welfare did not originate in the state, but from small autonomous working-class associations and friendly societies (Ward, 1996). These associations were also political societies and pressure groups, fighting for better housing conditions and sanitary improvements. Mutual aid both relieved poverty (Davis Smith, 1995) and created social and political networks founded on solidarity, mutuality and democratic, local control. As plural and decentralised

bodies, based on the notion of reciprocity, they were the antithesis of the centralising and hierarchical welfare state that ultimately replaced them (Ward, 1996), which 'substituted fraternalism for paternalism' (Wilkin and Boudeau, 2015, 12). Conversely, mutualism is about autonomy and control.

We can see the beginnings of such a movement in the tentative growth of alternative forms of housing such as co-operatives and community land trusts, groups of people actively trying to create more sustainable and convivial communities through the building and ongoing management of their housing. Today, co-operative and mutual housing accounts for just 1 per cent of UK homes, compared with 18 per cent in Sweden and 15 per cent in Norway (Locality, 2016). Although the UK lags woefully behind its neighbours, there is an increasing interest in mutual forms of housing from the public and within political parties.

Yet funding for such projects can be difficult to acquire, and availability of land is the most pressing issue, particularly for urban-based projects, while the continued financial attack on local authorities means that they have lost much of the capacity and skills base that they once had; groups are less likely to receive advice, never mind funding, from local councils for community-led housing projects. However, every now and then a group brings a project forward successfully. We can see this on a larger scale in the north of England in the self-help housing movement, which has helped bring hundreds of empty properties back into use, often providing training and educational opportunities for unemployed and homeless people from the local area (see Mullins, 2010; Teasdale et al., 2011; Moore and Mullins, 2013).

Whilst the case for support for participatory housing might be easier to make than with other community-based housing, due to the obvious added value of such projects, the process is far more complex and lengthier because of the time needed to maximise opportunities for skills, confidence and capacity building, to form strong group relationships and to work within a relatively hierarchy-free structure. Furthermore, because of the potential support networks that participants in participatory housing projects may need, it is likely that most groups would need to work in collaboration with a charity or other support organisation, which could make the process more complex.

During Protohome we worked alongside Crisis and the local authority (who helped with land acquisition, general housing advice and organising events), and although ours was a fruitful collaboration, there were, at points, definite differences of vision and value. Yet, ultimately, participatory housing projects require that groups work within a 'space

of negotiation' (Fiori and Ramirez, 1992, 28), which requires reflexivity of thinking and political pluralism. Working this space may be difficult and there is often a fine line between collaboration and co-option, where compromises of vision, ethics and process will be made.

A question of value

Inevitably though, if we are to see a growth in participatory housing, then we also need to question how 'value' is defined. For councils, especially in a time of squeezed budgets, 'highest and best use' is viewed predominantly on an economic level, in terms of *market* value as opposed to *social* value. Yet we need to question the logic of the market being the driver of urban change, because it creates unequal cities and short-termism. We especially need to look at alternative types of value that might be created by participatory approaches to housing in times of economic uncertainty (see also Forde, this volume). This means understanding that value is not always created immediately, but might only become present at a later stage and may also be less easy to quantify. So 'soft' impacts, such as behaviour change, increased confidence and learning – elements that may be less tangible or may be subjective – are equally as important as those that are concretely quantifiable (Pain et al., 2016).

The focus on 'value for money' through mass housing, which often lacks affordable house provision, may also create longer-term economic problems, as the Barker Review (2004) identified: 'Inadequate housing means (that) the UK will become an increasingly expensive place to do business, with high housing costs and reduced labour market mobility.' So, whilst participatory housing projects may play a qualitative role in improving the general quality of life of participant-builders, they can also generate quantifiable long-term savings in welfare spending (getting people into work and off benefits, improving health and well-being), and create sustainable and affordable housing typologies in a time of 'housing crisis'.

Politicising the movement

In the same way that mutual societies of the past connected self-help with political emancipation, we should ask how localised practices of participatory housing might feed into broader social and political movements, such as campaigns to regulate the private rental sector, or those against the demolition of council housing (Featherstone et al., 2012). Increasingly, as austerity is localised to the town hall, even the inadequate tick-box method of 'public consultation' in urban development matters is

being bypassed. In such 'extreme' economic times, the public and even local councillors are increasingly seen as a nuisance (Ormerod, 2016). Manzi (2015) calls this an 'ideological crisis', when decision-making is taken out of the hands of the democratically elected local political framework and is instead replaced with informal, and sometimes concealed, engagement with private developers. Arguably, these working practices are being mobilised by local authorities in a state of crisis, the seemingly false choice of large-scale, poor-quality solutions or nothing. But this is a red herring.

De-democratising housing development may, in the end, have a negative impact upon local authorities' budgets, leading to unsustainable communities, poor housing options and rising housing inequality, where the 'have-nots' live on the urban periphery in an increasingly residual social housing sector, whilst the urban core is reserved for the wealthy – Harvey's (2004) 'accumulation by dispossession'. Therefore, it is imperative that we ask who *really* has control? Who *really* has power? Who is it for? Who's benefiting? Who's losing out? Is there a different and distinctive method for housing and urban development that is *really* locally grounded in people and place and involves both human and urban repair?

Lastly, a test case like Protohome highlights that it is the *relationships between people* that are key, that persist, and that have not been lost through years of austerity and hardship. In tracing the history of mutual aid organisations, Ward (1996) suggests that although the political and economic climate has changed, the fundamental everyday, non-hierarchical acts and moments of informal co-operation that make up society – how people work together, learn from each other and problem-solve – have not. These social practices are what Protohome had an abundance of, as one of our members stated:

> Protohome's been all about the people, as much as it's been about housing … and how people work together to empower each other to make some kind of change, make some difference, make some kind of progress.

It extends the realm of social practice and opens up possibilities for this to happen within housing. And in doing so, it understands that people value things that they have taken a hand in building, running, and maintaining themselves.

7

Of flux or finality? On the process and dynamics of a co-housing group in formation

Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia and Kathleen Scanlon

Walking in…

12.15 pm. Saturday. It's an unusually warm and sunny August day. I'm still panting from the climb up the steep hill that leads to the old, always impressive Victorian house and, despite my fears, I'm actually on time. A few people are standing around nibbling on some food. There's likely to be a slow trickle of members walking in late. But lately, numbers have been low and, except for Isabel, people have stopped sending their email apologies beforehand.

I'm greeted by a smiling Mark who, as usual in these monthly meetings, has already set out mismatched mugs, a kettle, cutlery and plates on the long blue plastic tables in the far-right corner of the room. As the guardian employed by the housing association that owns the property and land, he knows where things go and reminds us that he doesn't mind doing this or picking up after us when we leave. I ask how things have been. 'Slow – same as last time. Which is perfectly fine by me!' I serve myself some of the pot-luck lunch, which is increasingly store-bought and bready, and sit in a chair with my notebook, ready to take the minutes. My back is facing the garden doors, which have happily been kept open today for the breeze to come in, but also so that Leo's small terrier can come in and out as he pleases, though he tends to sleep and snore through the meeting under the table.

This week is an important one. The Featherstone senior co-housing group recently reached a sort of stand-off with the housing association, which announced – after four years of planning – that

it would not be going ahead with the scheme. This was an unexpected turn for everyone, particularly those who had stuck with it for so long. Surprisingly little has happened since that announcement and I'm really hoping some conclusions, agreements or ways forward will be proposed today. The idea that the group itself might buy the site and become their own developers was raised at the last couple of meetings but nothing has actually happened. It's still not clear which members are prepared to commit financially, or how much money they could spend. Judging by some of the resigned expressions around the table, today may prove equally unproductive.

Barbara, who always chairs the session, said the housing association representative she met with the day before had not provided much information beyond what the group already knew. Frustrated, she described their dismissiveness and generally disrespectful attitude. They had given two clear messages, she said: that their options about what they would do with the property were still 'open', and that they'd be willing to consider an offer put forward by the group.

Barbara had prepared a back-of-the-envelope calculation of what it might cost the group to buy the house and refurbish it themselves. She wanted to get clear commitments from others, and had come prepared with a list of the things that needed following up if they were to buy the site – from arranging finance and independent property valuations to finding plumbers and more residents. Isabel and Tom were not convinced by some of her calculations and wondered whether it would be better to engage an expert development advisor.

Beyond the additional time that developing the site would now take, acting as developers would also require the group to incur major up-front expenditure that they hadn't expected. But should they already be talking about construction plans when they didn't know whether the housing association would actually sell the site to them as a co-housing group? Several members argued that the group should ask for a formal meeting with the association before making an offer.

Barbara agreed to draft a letter on their behalf and send it around. Three weeks later she emailed group members saying the housing association 'would be happy to accept our offer … for the whole site [but] … I have yet to clarify the extent to which they would co-operate with the complexity of members purchasing their

share. This is obviously a key issue which will be raised when we next meet with them. I think we are approaching "crunch" time. We need those interested to make their intentions clear … I would be grateful if you would confirm your interest as soon as possible. I will then arrange a meeting as soon as possible.'

Months later this meeting, and the group's offer, were still up in the air. Several members had left because of the continuing uncertainty, leaving a rump of about five people struggling to put together enough money to buy and develop the site.

Just as the project looked like it might fall apart, a possible rescuer appeared. By chance, another co-housing group from a nearby part of London heard of Featherstone. These individuals and couples, mostly in their thirties and many with small children, had been meeting for some time but had not found a site – and decided to join forces with the existing Featherstone group. Was this a win-win arrangement? It could help materialise the dreams of both groups, as one set had a potential site but were short of money, while the others had some money but no site. But this new configuration would also mean revisiting and reworking core questions about social objectives, design ideas and working principles. And the dynamics of the group (or groups) would inevitably also change.

Introduction

In this chapter, we give an account of how five years after Featherstone first came together it found itself, in a sense, starting again from scratch. We attempt to fill some of the crucial gaps we see in both the mainstream and alternative housing literature concerning the realm of the social within processes of alternative housing formation. We ask where the 'social' can be located (or how it can be understood) during the creation of a collectivity with an initially 'alternative' social ethos that coincides with a traditional housing construction endeavour. What multi-scalar geographies of the home[1] sustain or challenge the dual goals of creating a cohesive collective and a shared physical dwelling?

Defining 'the social' in Featherstone means elaborating on its process of group formation and the multiple, unstable and fragile relations between people, institutions and materials that have been created and reconfigured over a five-year period, including our own – as researchers – deeply invested in the process over time. We have found this alternative

housing initiative to be a shifting configuration of precarious, fragile relations – a flux rather than a final distinguishable 'group'.

We analyse a single co-housing case study with unique characteristics; it must be understood as specific and in context (Yin, 2009). This singularity is heightened when we consider that co-housing is a 'niche' product in the UK's mainstream housing market. Nevertheless, the established literature and our own membership of various co-housing networks and housing research circles allow us to make some generalisations and comparisons around, for example, the barriers to development in a context laden with dominant economic and political hurdles or difficulties around collective decision-making.

Where is the social in alternative housing formation?

Generally speaking, traditional housing studies locate the social as something that happens outside or is separate from housing itself. For this body of scholarship, housing is a built form that responds to political, material and financial structures. The actual people or the lived, imagined or expanded senses of home that form part of it are usually secondary (if present at all) as objects of research. By subtracting things like emotions, personal relations and affect from the 'housing' equation, results are seen as more objective. But this approach misses some of the key ways in which places are created and inhabited, lived in or broken down (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Brickell, 2012). It can produce a simplistic version of the domestic where people and relations are secondary to finance and policy, rather than central to it (Jacobs, 2002; Madden and Marcuse, 2016).

Those looking at questions of alternative housing – whether in the form of eco-homes, co-housing or self-build, to name a few – have been more attuned to the interplay between the social, political, economic and material (Brenton, 1998; Chatterton, 2013, 2015; McCamant and Durrett, 1994, Urban Research and Practice, 2015; Williams, 2005). But even in the growing body of work that recognises these intersections, the focus tends to be more on the technological, design or policy aspects than on the messier and often emotionally fraught realms of everyday life. We are aware of no studies that look specifically or more ethnographically at the complicated dynamics and interactions that take place *during* (rather than after) the creation of one of these alternative schemes.

What follows will examine some of these relations in the course of the formation of a co-housing group. This kind of collaborative, community-led housing is notoriously difficult to define given the multiple kinds of

social, ideological and physical forms it can take within and across countries. Generally (see also Hudson, this volume), we define it as an alternative, non-institutional form of communal living that:

> usually includes private individual or family homes, which may be owned or rented, clustered around spaces and facilities that are collectively used. Food is often a focus, with community food production and/or a common house for shared meals. The communities generally have non-hierarchical structures and decision-making processes, and are usually designed, planned and managed by the residents. (Jarvis et al., 2016)

The creation of a co-housing scheme – including the formation of a group and the physical development process – can be long and drawnout. The issues that arise in the design and development process, and during occupancy, are very different from those faced in mainstream housing development. The challenges include working collaboratively to agree a physical layout and choose a design scheme and materials; coming to know one another before living together; going through the planning application process; discussing membership rules; figuring out (or at least thinking about) internal policies; and coping with the risk and uncertainty of much of the process. Depending on group members' own circumstances and the external context, this protracted gestation period could provide a welcome period to solidify social bonds and strengthen resolve, or could generate pressure and tensions that disrupt group development and diminish staying power – or indeed both.

In addition to these internal dynamics, there are structural circumstances that limit co-housing groups' ability to manoeuvre in the dominant housing market, including: the UK's land economy and London's exorbitant land prices, which favour large housebuilders and their established systems of negotiation; a general lack of local authority or planning knowledge regarding alternative housing provision and procurement; and an undeveloped ecosystem of professional services or training to support this growing sector (e.g. legal or financial experts) (Fernández and Scanlon, 2016).

Research participation, identity and responsibility

As researchers, we had a tremendous stroke of luck in September 2011. Quite by chance we learned about the first co-housing open day at

Featherstone Lodge and decided to attend. Thus, our first encounter with the group was also their first encounter with each other. The event was organised by the new owner of the building, a housing association that bought the site at the behest of a local couple in order to develop a co-housing scheme. The open day was held to recruit potential residents by showing off the site and its beautiful garden. The interest was palpable – about 35 people came, even though the event wasn't widely publicised.

We entered the field with few pre-conceptions. Our impressions of the group and their interactions were filtered through our respective disciplinary lenses and informed by our general understanding of housing policy and housing resistance movements, but we had no particular research agenda beyond a general desire to find out what would happen. Because of our newness to this environment, and because we were bound to no deadline given that the research was unfunded, we presented ourselves from the beginning as indefinite 'observers' of the process. In exchange for the group's permission to observe them, we agreed to take minutes for as long as required.

Minute-taking as a form of research participation is a complicated act of translation which, like the act of research and writing itself, endows the minute-taker with authority over what gets officially communicated and how. While we spoke little in meetings because we were busy writing and did not want to impose our own views, the group's official recorded memory is based on our own active categorisation of boundaries. Minutes can be understood as a space of 'objective' recollection and sterile presentation of events, where personal or emotional perspectives are stripped out to achieve 'objectivity'. While this artificial extraction of views and affect is standard practice for minute-takers, we found that it presented issues as a form of research practice.

Minute-taking relegated us to an unrealistic fixed identity and 'objective' position. While it drew us closer to the material through privileged space of recollection and official translation, it also distanced us from our object of research in problematic ways. Specifically, the elimination of affect from official records requires emotional work that is rarely recognised in research. Having to carefully negotiate what gets separated into personal fieldnotes, stored in memory, or wilfully forgotten is an act of written rhetorical persuasion (Atkinson, cited in Back, 1998, 286). In addition, the minute-taker can affect subsequent events, as interactions at future meetings may respond to the codified language of the minutes – which may or may not reflect what participants in the room *felt* to be most important. The minutes certainly do not capture the affect of the room. These codes, which reduce messy social realities and reproduce

official conventions of minute-taking to make familiar sense of complexity (Kondo, 1990), are also qualitatively different from the kinds of analytic categories we would usually use as academics. In effect, they require a simplified representation of ongoing social practices and relations.

As researchers, we have been caught between contradictory responsibilities. At the outset, we wanted to respect the traditional ethnographic convention of non-interference; we realised that whatever we did or said might impact the group's development but would have no major consequences (in housing terms) for us. After all, Featherstone isn't going to be *our* home. On the other hand, the Featherstone project inspired us to deepen our academic and practical understanding of co-housing: over the last five years we have absorbed a huge amount of knowledge about the policy and practice of alternative housing developments in the UK and abroad and have become members of several research networks devoted to the topic. We increasingly wonder whether our responsibility is to share that knowledge and express our opinions when we feel strongly about something. Our status as researcher-participants can be said to be in as much flux as Featherstone itself.

The house as palimpsest

Most co-housing developments are new-build structures, so groups normally meet to plan their future homes and common spaces in rented or borrowed rooms, offices, cafés, members' existing homes, etc. Featherstone co-housing is different. The site, bought by the housing association in 2011, consists of a 1.5-acre walled garden (unusually large for London) with a grand Victorian home dating back to 1858. This is the structure that the co-housing group intends to refurbish for their new homes.

This old house is not just a backdrop to the action but a central component of and participant in it. It is (almost exclusively) the place where the would-be residents have come together every last Saturday of the month (or more often) to discuss the site's development. Their process of imagining a new community has therefore been framed by this material place, imbued with history and associations. And Featherstone had already been a space for innovation and alternative modes of inhabiting the city. The various phases in the life of the house point to broad structural changes in British society, to the pioneering spirit of local doctors and the local authority, and to the characteristics and tastes of its neighbours over time.

Figure 7.1   Featherstone then (© National Archives)

Figure 7.2   Featherstone now (© Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia)

Featherstone Lodge was built in 1858 by a wealthy London businessman and passed through the hands of just three families up to the late 1920s. But such houses gradually lost their appeal to the moneyed classes and in the 1930s it became a private care home for wealthy women. In 1952, the building was acquired by King's College Hospital and used as a nurses' hostel, but by 1968 it had very few residents and the hospital had reportedly forgotten that it owned the property (Tomlinson, 2013).

At just that time, Dr Griffith Edwards, a psychiatrist who worked at the Maudsley Hospital's addiction unit, was in search of such a building. In the 1960s the problem of heroin addiction was growing and British doctors were looking for ways to deal with it. Edwards had visited New York to learn about the concept-based therapeutic communities model pioneered by Synanon in California (Yates, 2003; Phoenix Futures, n.d.), which claimed impressive results. It created highly structured communities where all work was done by residents themselves, with clear and very strict rules (and punishments). Residents were expected to remain for at least a year. Edwards convinced the hospital managers to let him use the near-vacant Featherstone to pilot the approach in the UK.

The establishment of Phoenix House (as it was named by the first directors) was supported by the London boroughs and by the Home Office, which was represented on the board. However, it was hugely controversial locally: some neighbours protested against it, while others fiercely defended it. These mixed reactions, we will later see, are not entirely dissimilar from those of Featherstone's current neighbours.

The first patients moved in in 1970 and were treated using the 'hard care' regime developed in the USA. They were deprived of their possessions, and those who committed small misdemeanours had their heads shaved or were made to wear large wooden signs around their necks. As the scheme aged, the treatment became less confrontational and aggressive; its fame grew and in the 1970s it had up to 50 residents. Residents learned to garden; 'there were chickens and hens but nobody could bring themselves to kill them so they died of old age' (Tomlinson, 2013). Neighbours came to accept Phoenix House and attend its regular garden parties. The place inspired tremendous loyalty; there was 'a feeling that people were part of a revolutionary movement – there was a camaraderie about it' (Tomlinson, 2013). While their processes and purposes are very different, co-housing inspires similar kinds of attachment to its anti-mainstream housing cause. Whether Featherstone members will become ingrained in their environment in the same way is yet to be seen.

While in the ownership of Phoenix House, the building was thoroughly institutionalised. A steel-framed gym was built in the grounds;
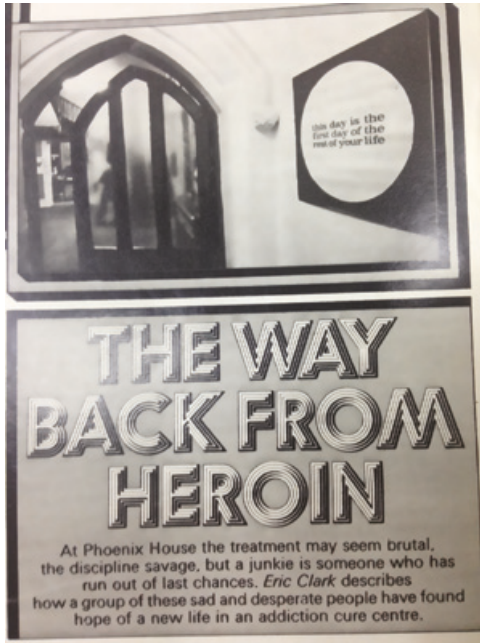
Figure 7.3   A feature story on Phoenix House (© *Honey* magazine, March 1973)

Figure 7.4   A garden 'jamboree' with Phoenix House residents (© National Archives)

many original features including fireplaces and plasterwork were removed; windows were replaced with unattractive uPVC double-glazing; and additional sound-proofing was added to reduce noise transmission from patients' screams and shouts during early therapy sessions. The co-housing group have had to decide how to deal with all these elements during the co-design process.

Phoenix House was one of the first centres of its kind, and Phoenix Futures (as the organisation is now called) currently operates across the UK. But Featherstone itself was superseded by more up-to-date, purpose-built facilities, and was in addition expensive to operate. In 2007, Phoenix House closed and the house was put up for sale. Its fate mirrored that of many similar houses used as nursing homes and residential centres, as treatment regimes changed and the houses became too expensive to operate, especially in London.

The co-housing group(s)

We refer to 'the group', but its membership and composition were far from fixed, and our observations should be read in that light. The number of relatively active members (as measured by attendance at meetings) ranged from 5 to 15, and during the period in which we have observed the process there have been at least 60 individuals involved. Some attended only one meeting while others stayed for several years, but at the time of writing only three of those who attended in 2011 were still active (plus us).[2]

Clearly this degree of flux brought shifts in priorities and constraints, as individuals with less money (for example) left, and those with more resources came in. Even so, there was a surprising consistency in the tenor and format of discussions, and even in the topics, as issues that one constellation of members had regarded as settled (e.g. the amount and purpose of membership dues) were re-opened by a new set.

On the whole, group members have devoted little effort to nurturing social ties. To date, they have not organised social events, drinks in the pub or visits to local cafés or other public spaces, of which there are many in the area. One former member, an artist, invited group members to her birthday party at a pub but received no replies. It is unclear why this was the case. Did members feel, consciously or not, that it was risky to invest too much emotionally in a scheme that might collapse?

It is clear that members' focus on the business and design side of things, all contained within their future housing environment, limited

Table 7.1 Key events in the Featherstone process to late 2016

Date	Event
1858	House is built.
1930	Turned into private care home for ladies.
1950	Taken over by King's College Hospital, used as nurses' hostel.
1969	Ownership transferred to the Maudsley; Phoenix House begins to operate.
Early 1970s	Purchased by Phoenix House.
2007	Phoenix House closes.
May 2011	Housing association purchases house for conversion to senior co-housing community.
September 2011	First open house for prospective residents.
December 2011–June 2012	Collaborative design process (though work with architects continues into 2014).
August 2012	Pre-application meeting with local authority.
September 2012	First target date for submitting planning application (not achieved).
November 2012	Initial costings received; first open day for local residents.
Summer 2013	Planning application submitted, then withdrawn for re-working.
April 2014	Final version of planning application submitted.
July 2014	Neighbours express opposition at consultation meeting.
November 2014	Planning committee considers application and refuses permission.
January 2015	Planning committee reconsiders application; permission granted for 33-unit scheme with new build in garden.
February 2015	Builders supply quotes, all far higher than anticipated.
Early 2015	Discovery of importance of restrictive covenant.
June 2015	Housing association decides to sell, offers group first refusal.

Table 7.1 (*Cont.*)

Date	Event
Late 2015–mid-2016	Attempts to assemble a new group that can purchase site and develop it themselves with fewer units; removal of over-50 age restriction.
2015–2016	Discussion of various options for new scheme involving conversion of existing house only
October 2016	Established co-housing group from neighbouring area joins.

their possibilities of getting to know one another and allowed for a vast amount of silences. This was exacerbated by the wearying turnover of individuals around the table – so that even five years into the process, (current) members knew relatively little about each others' personal lives and backgrounds. In a way, then, despite regular interaction with the house and one another over a more or less extended period, members' social dynamics both within that structure and outside of it evince a real distance from one another and from the housing space. This socio-material disconnect can be seen as a practical one within the context of development risk, or it can be its own risk in terms of group sustainability.

Another crucial point has to do with the internal dynamics of the group. Despite formally identifying themselves as a co-housing group, the distribution of activities (e.g. chairing of meetings, tasks) followed a more traditional top-down 'leadership' rather than sociocracy model. The two founding members acted as gatekeepers to much of the information and communication with the housing association, and often made decisions on behalf of the group. There was an implicit assumption that decisions would reflect consensus, but never any explicit discussion of how consensus would be reached when there were differences of view.

The first-among-equals role of the founders is perhaps understandable because the group's membership has been so fluid: with little continuity in the group's composition from one month to the next, never mind one year to the next, the founder members (and the authors) were almost the only people with a full understanding of the scheme. Yet ironically, the fact that a more consensual approach was difficult because of churn simply generated more churn, as members left because they felt the project was evolving in a way that did not include them (departures included a member who wanted to self-build with straw bales; a neighbour who

Figure 7.5 Featherstone entrance hall, 2013 (© Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia)

wanted to be a member even though she wasn't planning to live in the scheme; and several individuals who wanted more rental or shared ownership options, or to explore mutual or common-hold ownership).

This raises the question of how much the ethos of co-housing has informed the Featherstone process so far, beyond the co-design elements. Some of the early members had experience living in communal settings and were committed to the social nature of co-housing, but over time they drifted away. More recent arrivals were on the whole more interested in the promise of the site (and its relative cheapness) than in creating an intentional community, and their views about ownership models were, generally speaking, mainstream. The trajectory – from commitment to the social to a focus on the spreadsheet – has been reinforced because the need to deal with pressing issues of cost and development has overridden all other matters. On the other hand, although very few of the early members are still involved, many did engage wholeheartedly with an onerous time- and energy-consuming process that is usual for co-housing, but very different from the typical home-buying model, and required them, at the very least, to manage their differences in order to keep meeting.

The absence of a rigid system of rules, five years into the group's existence, has arguably made it easier to incorporate new members, but also made it difficult for those new members to understand exactly what they were getting into. If and when the development does happen, those people left in the circle will be forced to address questions of community cohesion and internal collaborative policies.

The composition of members in terms of socio-economic position and demographics changed markedly over the five-year period. Featherstone began as a very open and encompassing group that would admit anyone as a member, so long as they were interested in the concept and were over 50 years old (as the scheme was originally restricted to older people). This included low-income individuals who could not afford to buy their unit but would become tenants or purchase through shared ownership. The original intention was that the scheme would include about seven units of social rented housing for existing local-authority tenants who were downsizing. The group wanted to meet and incorporate these social tenants from the earliest stages, but the local authority said they could not identify them until the scheme was close to finished. This is now a moot question as the proposed new scheme is much smaller (10–12 units) and may well have no social housing at all. Not only were the potential social housing tenants never involved, but most of the members with lower incomes or little housing equity stopped attending over the years. Some said explicitly that they couldn't afford the (ever-increasing) prices while others may have had other reasons; in any case, the group's composition became more homogeneous: middle- to upper-income owner-occupiers from south London.

The uncertainty that has plagued the group's five-year process has certainly made it difficult to retain a stable membership. But this alone cannot explain why achieving a sense of identity, in the way co-housing often does during group-building dynamics in the first years, has been so difficult for Featherstone. Since the beginning, the group has displayed a marked lack of interest in or outright rejection of the idea of engaging external consultants or professionals to help with particular aspects of their group process or project management. This was often framed as a desire not to be handled or controlled from above; concern about cost was also a factor.

In September 2014, we were asked to facilitate and lead their first (and so far, only) workshop around group ethos, processes and policies. We were pleased that the group trusted us to do this and happily provided our untrained support. The day-long session with a group of 12 was lively and productive, with some clear timelines and ideas outlined
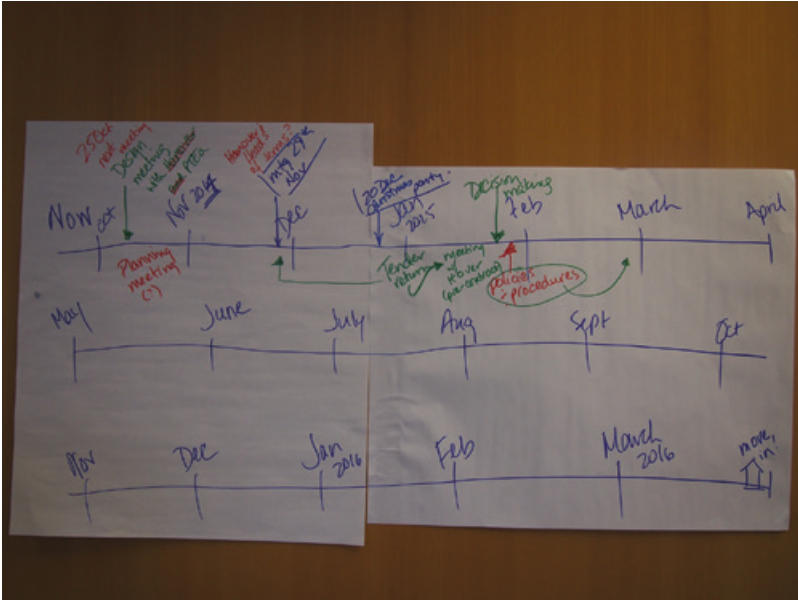
Figure 7.6   Timeline from September 2014 facilitation session
(© Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia)

for the future (see Figure 7.6), but these goals remained aspirational as practical priorities and unexpected changes in the development process took over (see the timeline in Table 7.1).

The meeting room as container and process

Featherstone meetings are a time for gathering and discussing development practicalities. They have always been held in the same large room in the corner of the ground floor, so everyone immediately turns left down a long corridor and into that space. It has a blue carpet and doors that open onto the garden. The space is big enough to fit many tables and chairs in different configurations, but is usually set up in a large roundtable format. For years, regular sessions were usually preceded by a pot-luck lunch. For the first year-and-a-half, much of the food brought by members was homemade, elaborate and delicious. Over time, the quality and range of food decreased: fewer people brought home-cooked meals; more often than not, choices were from Sainsbury's; and some members didn't bring anything at all. The collective waning of excitement and interest in the food has paralleled the loss of enthusiasm within the group. When food is an important part of the way a

group coalesces and comes to know each other, its taste or abundance can become a significant sensory lens through which to measure feelings (that remain publicly unexpressed).

The architectural models

Over time, one section of the corner meeting room has been accumulating paper and materials brought in for or produced during the design process. Plans, pictures, large Post-It notes and other ephemera all sit disorganised on tables or are stuck on a wall. A white Styrofoam model of the would-be development now leans in a corner, but for a long time sat in the middle of the table around which the group met, providing a visual focal point. This model was on display – along with the architect's printed designs – in the pre-planning open house for neighbours.

The physical presence of these plans and models were the material link between the group's current status and its imagined future. Albena Yaneva frames these physical models as one of the scattered elements of 'the architectural' (2010, 42).[3] These are not just 'mere' representations, but real actors that helped to solidify a common (if contested) aspiration that would otherwise be abstract and difficult to pin down. Design models, here, are a 'connector' and enactor of social process (Yaneva, 2009, 2010), a force that binds and ties in a highly contextualised fashion. For those group members who worked on them, their presence generated a sense of having 'done something' (coming up with a design collaboratively) and of having something in common. Unlike the 3D imaging involved in high-spec architectural design, the 'atmosphere' (Degen et al., forthcoming) this stripped visualisation tool created was a kind of phantom presence: a would-be future that was apparent but ungraspable. It points to the importance of the realm of imagination and projected future that is always there traversing a housing group formation process of this kind. In research terms, it is important to see how this imagination manifests itself, and how much of it is allowed to be 'out in the open' (like an architectural model) or contained in other less material ways of being.

But by late 2016, as the model gathered dust and the coloured Post-Its from 2012 detached themselves from the wall, these objects had also become talismans of the failure of the original vision. And for the newest members of the group – the young co-housers hoping to make the Featherstone project theirs – they are an irrelevance: the design process has begun anew and the relics of the previous efforts elicit little interest.

Figure 7.7 Styrofoam architectural model of Featherstone co-housing (© Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia)

The sense of place

The fact that the group always meets in the place where they hope to live would seem to offer an opportunity for social rehearsal via repetition. By repeating the journey, members get to know the ways in and out of the site (some come by bike, others by bus, others carpool). By meeting in the same place, they could become comfortable or familiar with a future domestic space and get to know each other in the context of that prescribed shared space. But the reality has been rather different.

First, despite the enormous spaces of the house (it has 18 bedrooms) and its garden, the group has remained firmly bound to the one meeting room, except for some specific tasks during the co-design process and a few early membership committee meetings. This may have to do with the dilapidated state of some of the other rooms; with respect for Mark, the house's only resident, who acts as the property warden; or with a reluctance to connect with a place that will be stripped and

fully refurbished anyway. Meeting in the same room could also provide a familiarity and a sense of continuity, where unspoken rules about how to meet and act together are already unproblematically in place. But the fact that they have this room available means they have never met or (for the most part) even seen each other in other contexts, and members have never suggested meeting elsewhere.

The planning process and relations with the neighbours

Examining the social nature of the co-housing process cannot stop with the group itself, as the group's mood and direction were also affected by relations with others, including the scheme's neighbours. According to some advocates, a commitment to contribute to the wider neighbourhood is an essential element of the co-housing ethos (McCamant and Durrett, 1994).

The planning process offers an insight into the nature of relations with the neighbours. The first planning application for the full 33-unit housing-association scheme was submitted to the local council in the summer of 2013, but withdrawn shortly thereafter. A revised application was submitted in early 2014.

In the run-up to the first planning application, the housing association and the architects hosted an informational meeting for neighbours. This session unfortunately took place immediately after a very fraught meeting of the group, at which the housing association presented cost estimates for the new dwellings. These estimates were well in excess of what the group had expected. Feeling betrayed and angry, members declined to stay to meet the neighbours, leaving housing association officers and, in particular, the architects to explain the scheme and field questions.

The neighbours were almost universally opposed to the scheme, objecting, in particular, to the development of the garden, the degree of construction traffic and the expected increase in car traffic. They were unclear about what sort of development was being proposed and who would live there. Although the architects had designed informational leaflets about the scheme, these had never been distributed to local residents, nor had the group tried to meet neighbours.

A second session was held some months later, attended by a local councillor. This time, two group members did attend, though the

housing association representatives again did almost all the talking. At this meeting, furious hostility to the scheme was expressed by several attendees, particularly the owner of the (private) road over which the construction lorries would have to pass. There were echoes of the neighbourhood's resistance almost 50 years earlier to another unfamiliar scheme (Phoenix House) that similarly saw the house as a convenient empty vessel.

The local authority planning committee formally considered the application at a meeting in November 2014. Committee meetings are open to the public; two group members and one researcher attended. But residents of surrounding houses were much better organised, bringing a group of about 20. They had also been more effective at influencing politicians: the local councillor who attended the informational meeting spoke to express his opposition to the scheme. Permission was not granted at that meeting, but at its January 2015 meeting the committee considered the application again and granted it, having been advised by officers that there were no legal grounds for refusal.

These vignettes from the planning process show the contrast between the strong organisation and commitment of the neighbours, reflecting their very real common interests, and the much weaker level of participation from group members. It was notable that at the first planning committee meeting, a local resident gave a fluent and well-rehearsed presentation, enumerating the neighbours' objections to the scheme. Group members were familiar with this resident and his views and dismissed them scathingly in private, but at the committee meeting the few who attended all declined to speak.

Conclusions

We are interested in how an old Victorian house could accommodate new and alternative housing aspirations. This account shows how this powerful socio-material entity has acted as the focal point for an array of actors and processes – from the neighbours, the planning process and the housing association to the architects, the group members and us. It is perhaps not surprising that, as housing scholars, we are fascinated by the house, its history and its dilapidated present.

For the would-be residents, though, the co-design process during the first year of group formation looked mainly towards the future: what the house could become, not what it used to be. Moreover, their energies

and time were externally consumed by the practicalities and obstacles of the development process (all of which are, of course, connected to the possibilities or constraints imposed by the house and its specificity). As such, it has been more of an object of future concern.

In terms of the co-housing group formation, our research has suggested that the two possible ways for co-housing communities to form – group-first or site-first – may well be characterised by different social and psychological processes. The group-first model, as the name suggests, gains its strength from the identification of individual members with the ethos and identity of the group and from their growing trust in and commitment to fellow members – even in the absence of a site. On the other hand, if there is a clear-cut scheme on offer, the site-first model may generate a different kind of commitment: individuals can first buy in (in both senses) to the project and the building, then gradually coalesce into a (more or less) functioning social entity.

But if, as with Featherstone, there is neither a clear group ethos nor a definite scheme, there may not be enough for prospective members to commit to emotionally and psychologically. This leads to membership churn, as all but the most enthusiastic lose the will to continue; this turnover generates its own kind of centrifugal force as the membership of the group changes constantly, eroding any sense of mutual commitment. Over time, the unpredictability of people's engagement with Featherstone made the few long-standing members sceptical about new participants.

This negative spiral could perhaps have been countered if recognised in time. But in the Featherstone case there was a constant stream of practical, financial and design questions that demanded responses. The issue of how to nurture and develop the group was perceived as much less urgent (though arguably, in the long run, is more important). Finally, the decision of the housing association to pull out meant that if the project were to continue, the group itself would have to become the developer: rethink the scheme, find money to buy and refurbish the site, and bear the financial risk. This brought about a major paradigm shift: whereas before, anyone was in principle welcome to join, now only those who could pay their way could be accommodated.

These difficulties need to be understood in relation to the broader social, political, institutional and economic dynamics that relegate co-housing to niche status, especially in London. Like other non-mainstream housing solutions, it faces very real barriers which can seriously impede the ability to expand, sustain or even conjure an alternative ethos of collective sociality, both internally and externally (Scanlon and Fernández,

2015). To make inroads into this systemic obstruction, co-housing groups need to nurture the resilience and strength that will enable them to cohere through the long, arduous processes of development.

Creating a strong and cohesive group is particularly important because there are still so few co-housing communities in the UK. There is no established roadmap (yet), so each project is bespoke. Residents and everyone else involved – the local authority, housing association, neighbours, architects – must negotiate a steep learning curve. Compared to a standard housing market transaction or development, the co-housing process requires an enormous investment of time and energy, so residents need a level of commitment that approaches a religious calling.

The mutual support of a cohesive group can generate this kind of commitment. In another part of London, 26 members of Older Womens Co-Housing (OWCH) moved into their own purpose-built scheme in late 2016. The women of OWCH had been meeting on a monthly basis for 18 years with the goal of creating a co-housing community for older women. It took them 13 years to find a viable site, and they used that time to grow trust and camaraderie, to agree a shared vision, and to develop management and decision-making procedures. This depth of shared experience produced a tremendously resilient group: even though only some are accommodated in the new community, the group as a whole continues to meet and hold social events (albeit at a slower pace during the initial, time-consuming move-in phase).

By contrast, in countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, co-housing is an established part of the housing ecosystem (see Urban Research & Practice, 2015). The various actors are familiar with the process, which has become regularised, and prospective residents can have a much shorter, more 'transactional' entry into a co-housing community.

At Featherstone, one particular 'group' of people will eventually (we hope) move into a co-housing community. But these people will not be those that first met in September 2011, and calling it a 'group' does not accurately convey what has, in fact, been a continually shifting set of relations. Our experience of observing the process for over five years has demonstrated that despite some set and consistently identifiable elements, the highly participative nature of co-housing development and its marginal presence in the housing world makes its group status a highly contingent process, marked by complex social relations and shifting power dynamics. The 'unknowns' of this collaborative process may be made less risky through democratic decision-making practices or social

formation activities, but co-housing research should nevertheless be attuned to the messy, unsettled and fragile nature of co-housing groups. An analytic lens of flux, rather than finality, may help to better capture the nuance of actors and practices over time without forcefully reducing this kind of social formation to an a-temporal, fixed entity.

Part 3
Community and identity

8

Self-building as a practice of homemaking: the affective spaces of unfinished homes

Michaela Benson

> The camera pans to reveal the finished product, a self-built home. The details of the house are not important; every episode of *Grand Designs* ends this way, narrated by the presenter, Kevin McCloud, who makes a key point about the build, what can be learned from it, and often concludes with a comment about the perseverance of the self-builders.[1] The theme music kicks in, and you are left with a sense of completion. The programme has tracked the initial motivations, design and planning of a house, and followed the household through the build process. It has captured the difficulties, highlighting with dramatic tension the breakdown of social relations, the life events that take place alongside a build, financial challenges, and unexpected things that happen on site throughout this process. It often depicts self-build as an emotional rollercoaster, but this is all resolved by the end of the programme; leaving you with the vision of people settling into their homes.

This introductory vignette captures some of the main themes of this chapter: self-building, emotions and homemaking. However, while the narrative arc of this vignette gives the sense that once the house is completed home is made, the lived experience of this is quite different.

While at the outset self-builders – indeed, encouraged by the advocates, the how-to guides, programmes and tradeshows – weigh up whether they have the funds, knowledge and know-how to build, calculate the build time and arrange alternative living arrangements, they often overlook the significance of homemaking in the production of home through self-build. And yet, in working closely with self-builders, it

becomes clear that this is a 'stripped-down' version that does a disservice to what is often an intensely emotional process, through which ideals of home are challenged and contested – compromising the ability to make a home through building a house – as much as they are realised. This chapter therefore considers self-build as more than a process of housebuilding or a way of providing housing, turning additionally to the consideration of home and homemaking.

Drawing on ethnographic research with self-building households in England, I argue for a framework that understands self-build as homemaking. Through the focus on the self-build experiences of two households, the chapter presents the emerging house as an affective space, examining the emotional trajectories of these two households as they progress through their self-build. In this way, it lays bare the visceral experiences of self-building and how these challenge ideals of home. While the builds are organised around idealised imaginings of the home as stable and secure, the narratives here make clear that although houses may be finished, homes may still be in the making. In this way, the chapter makes manifest the ongoing practices of homemaking at the heart of the production of new homes to render visible a conceptualisation of self-build as homemaking, and to call for a *critical social science of self-build.*

Self-building as homemaking

As a first step in thinking about self-build as homemaking, I turn briefly to considerations of home. A multidimensional, contested and relational concept, home is a signifier with a range of different meanings (Depres, 1991; Mallett, 2004; Blunt and Dowling, 2006). It refers at once to the spatial, ideational and imaginary; it infers emotional attachments and affective relations; it is culturally (and temporally) constructed while also being subjectively experienced (Mallett, 2004; Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Pickerill, 2016); and it interplays with home and housing in dynamic and co-constitutive relationships. Indeed, it is this latter point that draws attention to the significance of materiality in the experience of home (Miller, 1998, 2001).

> If home becomes predominantly about emotions, experiences and politics, then we lose an understanding of the material – the physical shape, structure and influence of the walls, windows, doors, floors and ceilings … *the concepts of house and home are most usefully*

considered always in dynamic relation with each other (not separate discrete approaches). (Pickerill, 2016, 54, emphasis added)

The breadth of meaning caught up in the conceptualisation of home in turn gives rise to breadth of experience. It is within this complex conceptual landscape that self-build – as it interplays with the production of home, rather than houses – is located.

This chapter focuses on the tension between the home as intended by self-build – what might be understood as the ideal home, a spatial imaginary (Chapman and Hockey, 1999; Blunt and Dowling, 2006) – and home as it is lived in and through self-build documenting how homes and home are constituted and made through the process. The conceptualisation of home I adopt to examine this accounts for how the material, social, economic and affective articulate in the production of the self-built home, an ideal locus through which to examine this interplay. In adopting a lens on homemaking, understood as the personalised and localised experience of home (Young, 1997), the everyday practice of *doing home* (Ingold, 1995), the chapter offers a shift in focus from the construction of houses that lies at the heart of most understandings of self-build toward a sense of how the home is experienced and made through this process. It focuses therefore on self-built homes, intended here in distinction to self-build houses.

Conceptualising the self-built home

Considering self-building as homemaking is a valuable intervention into a body of work predominantly concerned with identifying the structural conditions that shape self-build and other forms of alternative housing in the United Kingdom and elsewhere (see, for example, Duncan and Rowe, 1993; Barlow et al., 2001; Wallace et al., 2013; Brown et al., 2013). Invariably describing how housing and planning policy, housing and land economies structure access to and uptake of these modes of housing procurement (see also Benson, 2014), this approach overlooks the social dimensions and dynamics of these processes (see Benson and Hamiduddin, this volume), but also the ways in which home and homemaking are implicated in the process of self-building.

My starting point here is Blunt and Dowling's *critical geography of home* that brings together the spatial and political: 'home as simultaneously material and imaginative; the nexus between home, power and identity; and home as multi-scalar' (2006, 22). In shifting the focus

from house and home, to house-as-home, they emphasise three areas of enquiry, (a) the relations between home and economy on a range of scales; (b) imaginaries of home – normative and idealised understandings – and how these are reinforced, practised and resisted; and (c) the social relations that structure and are structured by home and homemaking.

These analytical foci are a good starting point in (re-)mapping the small body of work on self-build – broadly defined following the intentions laid out in Benson and Hamiduddin's introduction to this volume – that extends beyond the policy and economic focus of much academic research in this area. Relations between the home and economy, particularly the idealisation of home ownership, are creatively challenged by the plotland developers – Hardy and Ward's (1984) protagonists – lower-income families spiralling into the home ownership otherwise out of their reach through this alternative mode of housing provision (see also Heffernan and de Wilde, this volume). Co-housing offers an alternative framing of home, disturbing the normative imaginary of home as the site of belonging and intimacy for the heterosexual nuclear family (Blunt and Dowling, 2006) in its organisation around support for senior living in community (Fernández and Scanlon; Hudson, this volume), with a built environment and particularly shared spaces that encourage new ways of conceiving of household and the process of homemaking. Indeed, Forde's contribution to this volume, where the shared hearth becomes the centre of a multi-family off-grid community, offers one illustration of how this might play out in practice. As Vannini and Taggert (2014) and Pickerill (2016, this volume) highlight, comfort – part of a broader imaginary of the 'ideal home' (Chapman and Hockey, 1999; Blunt and Dowling, 2006) – articulates with understandings of home, limiting the uptake of off-grid living and eco-homes, housing options that encourage more sustainable ways of living. These brief examples point to the urgency and necessity of *a critical social science approach to understanding self-build* as a housing practice, how this interplays with home – as spatial and political – and practices of homemaking.

The focus on lived experience in this chapter lies in the vein of research on the ways in which home intersects with identity and social relations, shaped by and structuring expectations of home, made through experience and practice. There is limited research on self-build that takes this as its primary focus. Exceptions to this are the qualitative enquiries into the experience of self-building by householders renovating and extending their properties conducted by Brown (2008) and Samuels (2008). These rich accounts identify how such

practices enhance the sense of home, and document the challenges of the professional-amateur relationship, with Brown (2008) additionally documenting self-build as a project of the self, a search for authenticity, everyday creativity and personal discovery. At the heart of these enquiries, though, is an unquestioned assumption that self-building equals home-building, their accounts echoing the narrative arc familiar from the opening vignette of this chapter, conflating the material and immaterial dimensions of home.

In other words, these prior published accounts do not go far enough in challenging the ready assumption that self-build practices produce homes. But if home is truly understood as a (necessarily) incomplete project, what might this then reveal of self-build as homemaking and how might we access this?

> We insist that one of the defining features of home is that it is both material and imaginative, a site and a set of meanings/emotions. Home is a material dwelling and *it is also an affective space, shaped by emotions and feelings of belonging* … we understand home as a relation between material and imaginative realms and processes. The physical location and psychological or emotional feeling are tied rather than separate. (Blunt and Dowling, 2006, 22, emphasis added)

My focus on homemaking in this chapter intends precisely to draw out the complex ways in which households make home through the process of self-building. The self-build as an *affective space* features prominently within this, a way of capturing how '[t]he idea of home and the practices of home-making support personal and collective identity in a more fluid and material sense' (Young, 1997, 164).

The protagonists of this chapter are owner-occupiers. This is unusual in the broader context of the volume, which seeks to demonstrate the diversity of self-build practices. And yet, they are representative of the predominant biography of self-builders in England, a mode of housing procurement dominated by owner-occupiers (Duncan and Rowe, 1993; Barlow et al., 2001; Wallace et al., 2013; Benson, 2014). In most cases, self-building in England requires substantial financial investment – the consequence of high land values and development costs. Household economics is therefore a central feature of many contemporary self-build projects; it facilitates housing development and becomes critical to the realisation of home through self-building. Inspired by Smith (2004, 2008; see also Munro and Smith, 2008; Christie et al.,

2008), the self-built home is understood as 'a hybrid of money, materials and meanings' (Smith, 2008, 521). In other words, there is a social life to these financial dimensions of housebuilding that needs to be accounted for in the consideration of self-building as homemaking.

As I argue here, the hopes and fears that drive financial and personal investments in bricks and mortar in the mainstream housing market (Smith, 2004, 2008) are similarly at play in self-building; the emotional work that articulates with rational calculation in the purchase of homes (Christie et al., 2008; Munro and Smith, 2008) is writ large in the case of self-builders. The (financial) risks are far greater – the financial outlay and investment are at odds with the lack of value of a house-in-progress, whose value is assured only once a house is certified as complete and in conformity with building regulations issued by the building controls office – and self-building is a source of considerable anxiety for households. Hopes, fears and anxieties are entangled with the household economies of individual self-build projects, making visible the interplay of the economic with the material, social and emotional dimensions of homemaking (see, for example, Smith, 2004, 2008; Christie et al., 2008; Munro and Smith, 2008).

Against this background, the chapter considers how the material manifestation and emotional economies of self-build houses are related to what several authors identify as the embodied and affective dimensions of home (see, for example, Easthope, 2004; Mallett, 2004; Massey, 2005; Blunt and Dowling, 2006). In this way, it examines how self-building interplays with practices of homemaking.

Listening to self-builders

This chapter draws from ethnographic case studies conducted with self-building households as part of the research project 'Self-building: the production and consumption of new homes from the perspective of households'. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ES/K001078/1, 2012–2015), this was a multi-sited ethnography examining self-building as a form of housing provision in England today. Through interviews and participant observation with experts – key stakeholders from industry and government – and documentary analysis throughout its duration, the project traced the relationship of self-build to the wider contexts of the housing and land economy. It focused on understanding the structural and systemic dimensions of self-build housing in England, taking seriously the implications of the changing contexts of

housing and its impact on access to self-build, the experience and process of self-building.

The project included case studies with 16 individual households and three group self-build projects, examining the experiences of self-builders as a way into understanding more about the process of self-building in England today. These case studies focused, in particular, on the position such homemaking practices occupy in the wider social worlds of households and individuals. These entailed repeat visits to the self-build site or house, and adopted a range of methods – in-depth interviewing, participant observation, participatory video methods – employed to make sense of the experience of self-builders. As the contributions to this volume have variously stated, there is very little published work drawing on in-depth research with those undertaking self-build (for notable exceptions see Brown, 2008; Samuels, 2008). And yet, such close-up approaches provide nuanced understandings of self-builders' experiences that can be valuable in demonstrating the limitations and challenges of the self-build as a housing practice, the social relationships that sustain it, and its financial constraints.

The two households introduced in this chapter – selected from the case studies – had expressed perhaps the most visceral responses to their build process, revealing the social dimensions of the build as these relate to their relationships with other household members, friends and family, to contractors and other practitioners involved in the build, but also to the house itself. They also clearly depict how these responses were wrought through unanticipated financial challenges that put at risk the ideals of home at the heart of their self-build projects. In recounting the emotional registers that characterise their projects, I reveal the complex intertwinings of housebuilding and homemaking.

I present the emotional trajectories of these projects as I heard and witnessed them in the research encounters. Invariably, these emotions were named (and claimed) – including those that they did not feel – by my interlocutors (see Ahmed, 2004, 13), but also reflexively produced and interpreted through the relationship between the researcher and the researched within the space of the research encounter (Gray, 2008; Walsh, 2012). At the time of the research and subsequently – in listening again, reading and watching the research materials – these narratives and actions continue to move me. Such emotion extends beyond my engagements; in presenting the narratives orally at conferences, I have additionally layered these so that participant-produced video material runs alongside my presentation. It is clear from questions and discussion following these presentations that this approach has moved the

audience, the video adding a further layer of complexity to the narratives presented below.

As Svašek (2008) makes clear, the production of empathy – itself drawn from shared cultural understanding – is crucial to the communication of emotion. Within the context of the research encounter, then, the production of emotion speaks to the reproduction of social and cultural relations. Further, as Gray argues, emotions are 'never absent from the research situation' (2008, 936). Inspired by Williams's (1977) 'structure of feeling', she calls for a reflexive engagement that recognises how emotions influence knowledge production, structuring and constraining the researchers' understandings. This enhanced understanding of reflexivity is central to the narratives and interpretation presented below.

Imagining homes

Les

Les had started his self-build project in 2006. He had sold his previous property in anticipation of finding a plot close to the sea. He was in his early sixties, and imagined building a house that he could retire to in 'God's waiting room' (as he described the British coast) that would cost him very little to run. When he found a plot with outline planning permission for an eco-home on the outskirts of a south coast seaside town he was excited. As a freelance camera operator, he had found that the work was starting to dry up, the phone with offers of work had stopped ringing so frequently and he read this as a sign that he was being eased into retirement. He bought the site, and approached the architects that had done the original planning outlines with his ideas for a modernist house. He had always admired the Case Study Houses, the aesthetics and minimalist open spaces that these included formed part of the inspiration for his new home.[2] Having previously managed some quite large home renovation projects, seeing each of these as part of his legacy, he was looking forward to the build, anticipating that he would enjoy the process and the resulting house.

Steve and Elsa

The original idea to build their own home had come from Steve, but it was clear that the rest of the family – his wife Elsa and two daughters – were enthusiastic about it, too. The decision to self-build had come from the observation that they would get a higher-quality and bigger house this

way than on the open market. Steve's experience working as a procurement officer would be essential to his role as project manager. In 2012, while riding his bike home from work, Steve accidentally came across a plot with detailed planning permission for an eco-home. He turned his bike around and went directly to the estate agent to register his interest.

The intention behind this build was that it would be the first family home that they had owned and lived in; a base for their daughters while they attended secondary school. Steve had had a long career in the armed forces, and while he had previously owned a house, the family had only ever lived in rented accommodation. This had meant that they could move around quite easily when required for Steve's job. However, as both Steve and Elsa described on separate occasions, this had also meant that their daughters had not had a lot of stability – their eldest daughter had had to move schools (and homes) five times. He and Elsa had decided that it was time that the girls had a permanent base; in future, if he was posted elsewhere, he would commute or live away from home. The new house should first and foremost represent stability. The house was to be a family project; the girls would, for the first time in their lives, be able to decorate their own bedrooms.

Emotion in and through the build

A jaundiced view

When I first spoke to Les on the phone in 2013, he was still on site, still building. He had initially imagined being able to sit back and watch while other people built his house, but had found himself doing a lot of the labour on site because of the spiralling costs of the development. He was angry over the architects, who, he felt, had misled him, massively underestimating the overall costs of the build. The build that had started off as his way into an independent and self-supported retirement now had to be rescued by his son, who had taken out a mortgage on the property to access the funds that would help Les to complete the build. An additional complication related to the fact that he had decided that he would get an architect's guarantee on the build – rather than the standard National House Building Council warranty. His recourse for the mistakes that he believed had been made was therefore limited because he was still reliant on the architects to provide certification to the council that the house and build met with regulations. Unable to say how he felt to the architects themselves, he had found that these things came out to anyone who would listen – the postman, the people who worked in the

local DIY shops, his friends, me … He described how this experience had made him into a 'glass half-empty person' rather than the 'glass half-full person' he had been before.

On my first visit to the house in 2014, Les explained to me that he had been struggling with depression, having being treated for over a year. Trying to get up every day and continue the work that was necessary on the house had been a real challenge. Furthermore, he had recently been diagnosed with cancer, and attributed this directly to the difficulties of the build. Conflating the difficulties of the build with his mental and physical health in this way drew attention to the visceral experience of this process, while also accentuating his emotional response. His description of the process of building and its influence on how he understood the house – 'it has certainly jaundiced my view of it' – unwittingly reproduced the impact of his cancer on his body, the first sign of which had been severe jaundice. In this way, Les narrates a deeply embodied experience of the build that was always lingering in the background, flavouring his day-to-day experience:

> I started off full of optimism and it's effectively turned into a bit of a nightmare … it's almost like a background hum in … if you work in an industrial place and there's this background noise all the time, the problem with the architect and the cost and things, it's always there … and then it comes to the front sometimes … repeatedly …

Hanging on by my fingertips

When I first spoke to Steve about his build, the financial stretch that they were making to get the build done was already in evidence. As he described, 'I'm quite shocked really at how poor I am … I'm scratching around trying to afford things, and hanging on by my fingertips at the moment'. At the time, I had the sense that he thought that this might subside, but as time went on and as I followed the build more closely, I started to get a sense of the delays that were emerging as a result of bad weather conditions but also cash flow problems. For the most part, though, Steve remained upbeat, keen to make sure that they were not risking everything for the build:

> I wanted to have moved in now. As I've said, I've had problems. Over the Christmas period, the weather was just appalling so … I've slowed down because … I wanted to make sure I get the quality in there and because I had concerns about funding as well. What you

don't want to do is to go along at risk; you want to be fairly secure so I've held the line. I'm not unhappy with what I've done; it's just par for the course, I think. But it could be easier.

From the start though, Elsa had been worried about money, finding the constant paying-out stressful and difficult alongside the frustrations with tradesmen and their ways of working. She described how she felt about the build on my first visit:

> Mixed emotions really. It's quite frustrating with the way the lenders work, and the way the building trades work, some can be very aggressive on the payment side of things, that I want this now, and then this then. So that's been quite frustrating … people turning up and saying, 'oh, that's not right', and then just turning away from the job again, and then it's another week before you can get hold of them, and they don't reply to your texts. That has been quite frustrating, which of course puts a delay on us, and financially you're paying your rent for this house plus starting to pay for a mortgage as well, so it's quite stressful that way … but I am sure that when we are in and settled, we'll be like, 'I'm so glad we did that'.

Unfortunately, this worry and concern would only grow as they continued through the build and tried to maintain a cash flow, juggling money between credit cards, as the 20 per cent buffer that they had put in place was completely eroded.

When I returned to the house to help Steve with some decorating in summer 2014, the full emotional impact of the build was brought to my attention. Elsa and the girls rarely came to the house; as Steve described, whenever Elsa came, she would end up in tears. The build had taken longer than they had expected and they were now reaching the stage where money was really tight as the final drawdown from the mortgage, which they sorely needed, had not yet been paid as the house did not meet the requirements to be signed off. At the same time, family life continued and with it, unanticipated costs; his daughter needed a new flute, and they had found themselves for the first time in their married lives really scrabbling around to find money. As Elsa described, in the final stages of the build, any days out had been because they had discount vouchers, and meals out had been through the coupons they got from the supermarket as all their available resources were placed in the build.

A project that had started as a way to gain stability and security for their family had turned into something more risky.

Stalled homemakings and uncertain futures

The emotions that accompany self-building impacted on how people related to the finished houses, at times stalling the process of homemaking as secure futures remained uncertain.

Elsa, Steve and their daughters finally moved into the house in September 2014, after considerable delays. I went to visit them early in 2015, partly to see the house, but also to talk to them more about the experience. It was half-term, and while Steve was out at work, both their daughters were at home. Elsa and I sat on the sofa while her younger daughter was making cupcakes in the kitchen behind us. Elsa had brought me a cup of tea and we sat chatting. I looked around, commenting on the house and how they must be pleased with the finished product. She thanked me, but her responses about the house in general were notably cool; I was startled as she did not convey any excitement about her house.

She called over to the kitchen to ask her daughter to check whether there was a 'tick'; this was the symbol that appeared on the meter when they were using energy that the house had generated. When her daughter replied yes, she explained that this would be the time that she would put on the washing machine on an ordinary day. She hurried into the utility room, where the washing machine was located, and quickly switched it on; the clothes had already been loaded, so it was ready to go. Her face had lit up at the idea of using this 'free' energy and, as she sat back down, she recalled with delight how the energy they had used to cook Christmas dinner had been free.

Her excitement and enthusiasm for the energy-saving potential of the house was in stark contrast to the sadness and frustration with which she described the final stages of the build. She had turned to her sister to explain the frustrations of the build; every time she had picked up the phone to speak to her, she would burst into tears. As I wrote in my fieldnotes that day:

> As she related this, her eyes started to well up with tears, and her voice wavered, changes that she drew attention to as she pronounced that even now, she found it difficult to think about those final stages without getting upset; it showed how deeply embodied the experience of the build had become, and how this was marked on her body. Indeed, later in the day, I was also able to see how this was marked on Steve's attitudes and relationship to the build as well; it was as though they were both still wearing the build – it had changed them as people.

The 'champagne-popping' moment that they had expected had not (yet) come, even though there was a bottle of champagne in the cupboard, ready and waiting for that moment. The party that they always thought they would have once they moved into the house hadn't happened; they had just not felt that it was the right time, or that they had the energy to do it. Part of this, Elsa felt, was that they hadn't really finished; there was still so much work left to do, finishing off here and there, touching up the paintwork, not to mention the garden and all the landscaping. She recognised that it was a comfortable house, but I had the sense that the stress of the build had tainted the sense of this being home; the effort and energy that had gone into constructing the house had exhausted them to the point where they had run out of energy (at least for now) to make the house home.

The story strangely echoed one told to me by Les on my visits to him. People would walk into the main living area, see the view from the floor-to-ceiling, wall-to-wall glass doors that ran the full width of the back the house and say 'Wow! That's fantastic', while 'I go yeah, and thank you very much and whatever but I couldn't see it, I couldn't even begin to see it'. His son had suggested having a party as a way of celebrating some of the good things about the build and saying thank you to some of the people who had been a real help in the process, but Les had been adamantly against this plan, angry that he might still find himself in the position of having to move on and out despite having sacrificed his health to the house.

In both cases, the imagined home with its offer of stability and security had been really compromised by the build. For Les, the house had become a source of anxiety and worry at a time when he had other concerns to attend to; rather than fulfilling his ambitions for retirement, he had laboured night and day to build the house. For Steve and Elsa, setting up the family home had been intended to allow some continuity and stability in their daughters' lives. But as their build unravelled, it became clear that part of the stability and security that the house offered was linked to their finances. Steve related this to me clearly as he described the build as:

> one of the biggest challenges I've ever taken on … every challenge you take on in your job, what's the worst that can happen? The worst thing is that you get found out as being an idiot and you get sacked, that's not as bad as investing your own money and your own life savings, and your family's future in a project, which is what we did here, and so the downside of getting it wrong was very serious.

Stepping off the rollercoaster?

Les's diagnosis of cancer had, in his own opinion, put the troubles relating to his self-build into some perspective, causing him to become 'more philosophical': 'having this health issue, suddenly, it's like, well that'll get dealt with when it gets dealt with, you know? This is far more important. And with that has come a pleasure in aspects of the house, and as they've come together.' Since being diagnosed he felt that he had stepped off the 'roller coaster', which was how he felt about the build and the architects. The analogy of the roller coaster conveys the sense in which this experience had been visceral; highlighting the deeply embodied impact of the whole experience of the build and his relationship with the architect.

Steve and Elsa, too, had started to stand back a little from their build. Since moving in, they had refocused their energies on doing nice things with the girls. Even the tasks that related to the house prioritised the girls' needs; for example, getting the garden ready so that they could bring out the trampoline that they had gone without the previous summer. Although there had still been no 'champagne-popping' moment, Steve described 'a growing relief' paired with a sense of certainty that 'there will be a moment when we finally decide that we're finished enough'. It seemed that there had been moments when the house had started to resemble a home. Just before Christmas, after living in the house for two months, they were finally able to move the remaining building materials into the garage – a move that meant that the house more closely resembled a home as opposed to living in a building site.

> I struggle to be proud of it, which is interesting because most people who come in are fairly impressed by it. So I'm seeing all the problems, and I'm remembering the process, and I'm too close to the process to really enjoy it. I think given another year, and given those major things finished, hopefully I will begin to like it.

Steve's description of how he feels about the house is telling. As an affective space, it has become more than a house; it holds difficult and compromising memories that intervene in the possibility of its becoming home. But this description also offers an insight into Steve's (and Elsa's) transition from housebuilding to homemaking, through which the house might, over time, become home, the stable and secure – in more ways than one – base they hoped for. Finishing the build and moving into the

house allowed them to move on from housebuilding and into the everyday practices of doing home.

Conclusion

When is the end of a self-build? Although we leave both households installed in their self-built houses, in both cases these remain unfinished homes. Their understanding of home as providing a sense of security and stability – albeit reflecting different stages in their lives – was disturbed and compromised precisely by the process of the build. The emotional journey – or roller coaster – that accompanied the build reveals that the ambitions, at least of these self-build projects, are deeply entangled with imaginaries of the home and practices of homemaking that building alone cannot produce. And it is this, perhaps, that is not captured by assuming the self-built house is a home.

Grand Designs has done exceptional work in terms of introducing the public to the possibilities of self-building houses in the United Kingdom. In the context of low levels of self-build, such second-hand experiences feed understandings and expectations of the process. Indeed, Les explained that he had been an avid viewer of *Grand Designs*; he owned many of the series on DVD and watched them time and again. But then he had started his own self-build, and he found that he could no longer watch them. Perhaps this points to the limited capacity of this narrative arc, this carefully curated and edited product, to communicate the complexities of self-building. The happy-ish ending that concludes each episode masks the raw emotion and visceral experience of the process. The closing bird's-eye view trained on the house occludes the view of the work that must now go into making this house a home.

While the self-build house might be designed and imagined as the ideal home, the work that goes into this extends beyond the material construction of a building. What is clear is that this is about more than furniture and decorating; it is about the emotional work that goes into making a home, including the work needed to put the stresses and strains of the build aside. As Clare, another of the participants in the research, aptly explained, 'You move into a building site and still have to make it into a home.'

Reading self-build as an affective space reveals the work of homemaking that necessarily needs to accompany the production of new houses if they are to be made home and to offer the feeling of being at home. The articulation of economics with home, ideals and imaginaries

shaping this experience; relationships within the household, with practitioners and tradespeople, but also with the materiality of the house framing such practices. In privileging an understanding of self-building as embedded within an ongoing and unfinished project of homemaking, what becomes clear through these two evocative accounts is that self-built homes remain in the making long after their material form is complete.

Addendum

Les died of cancer in October 2015, his feelings towards the house unresolved, the house still not formally signed off. The legacy? Perhaps Christmas 2014, when Les was first undergoing treatment for his cancer, his sons and ex-partner staying for the holiday season, the house functioning the way it should, cooking in the kitchen together and spending time together as a family.

9

Senior co-housing: restoring sociable community in later life

Jim Hudson

By the end of this decade, 4.2 million people in Britain will be over 65, and by 2040 over-65s will make up nearly a quarter of the total population (ONS, 2015; Hoff, 2015). The consequent strain on healthcare and social services is regularly reported in the media, but increasingly there is also discussion about the widely accepted links between social isolation and poor health in older age, amid a growing realisation that such problems in later life can no longer be addressed from a purely reactive, medicalised perspective. One idea gradually gaining a foothold in the United Kingdom might provide a practical response: the concept of small housing communities that are created by groups of older people themselves – often referred to as 'senior cohousing' (Brenton, 1998, 2013).

The co-housing movement shares many of the aims and concerns common to community-based projects that come under the umbrella of alternative and self-build housing; although not necessarily constructed by the residents themselves, all are commissioned and designed to meet the specific needs of the community or group, with a focus on participative design and often on different aspects of sustainability (Fromm, 1991). However, specific to co-housing is the concept of *intentional community*; although formed of individual, self-contained homes, co-housing is created and run by and for its residents, with the intention of making and sustaining a community. In physical terms, this means that all schemes incorporate a shared space, referred to as a 'common house', which ideally includes cooking facilities and is intended as the focus of the community (Field, 2004). Maria Brenton further emphasises the

advantages of specifically *senior* co-housing: informal mutual support between people in later life which aims to combat increasing isolation and offer the chance of a more engaged, healthy and independent old age (Brenton, 2013).

From its origins in Denmark in the 1970s, co-housing is well established in northern Europe, most notably in the Netherlands where, unusually, senior co-housing is the dominant form with well over 200 established senior groups (Kähler, 2010; Tummers, 2015a; LVCW, 2016). Recent years have also seen significant growth in the USA, Canada and Australia (Glass and Vander Plaats, 2013; Rogers, 2014; Jarvis, 2015). The UK has around 20 established co-housing schemes (UK Cohousing Network, 2016), although so far only one of these is specifically for older people – Older Womens Co-Housing (OWCH) in north London, whose members moved into their new homes at the end of 2016. Promisingly though, the UK has a larger number of older groups at formative stages, two of which are examined in this chapter.

Perhaps because senior co-housing is such a small phenomenon in most countries (albeit a growing one), there is at present relatively little academic literature, which is often either of a descriptive or prescriptive nature (cf. Durrett, 2009; Sangregorio, 2000; Sandstedt, 2010), or focuses on the practical or economic challenges of development (see, for example, Scott-Hunt, 2007; Scanlon and Fernández Arrigoitia, 2015; Tummers, 2015b). There are a few studies that describe the importance of community and social connection, as well as the greater quality of life and well-being that senior co-housing groups can offer (see, for example, Andresen and Runge, 2002; Choi and Paulsson, 2011; Kang et al., 2012). Forbes (2002, 6) finds that for co-housing schemes, 'connectedness and social participation contribute to a happier and healthier old age'.

There is, however, a lack of literature so far that explores the deeper motivations of those who join co-housing groups, their aspirations for such projects, and what co-housing might mean to them in the broader context of ageing and the choices available to them. The study of two senior co-housing groups presented in this chapter seeks to begin to address this deficit and, in doing so, will draw on wider theories and issues that relate to the ageing process. While recognising that in the UK at least, private wealth is key to the ability to develop such schemes, it aims to explore the attitudes and motivations of individual members in the broader contexts of social connection, class and belonging.

The case studies

Cohousing Woodside

The group, whose members are drawn largely from the Greater London area, aimed to develop their co-housing scheme on a former hospital site in north London. The site, in a relatively expensive area, is being built by the Hanover Housing Association as part of a larger development of around 160 homes, all for the over 55s (Hanover Housing Association, 2015). However, the housing association regards the co-housing element as a purely private venture, and in early 2016 a rise in anticipated sale prices led to the homes becoming unaffordable for a majority of the members. It currently seems very unlikely therefore that the groups will proceed any further, or that co-housing in any form will be a part of the completed development.

Cannock Mill Cohousing

The Cannock Mill group membership is also drawn largely from the Greater London area. But given the prohibitively high land costs, it was decided at an early stage to consider sites within 90 minutes by train from the centre of the capital. The group has purchased a site on the outskirts of Colchester in Essex and has recently gained planning permission for the development, which will incorporate a Grade II listed mill building on the site as the project's common house.

Co-housing group members: a general picture

Not all members of these two groups were of British origin, but all were ethnically white. Although there were exceptions, the interviewees shared a broadly middle-class background; a majority were educated

Table 9.1 Key figures – Cohousing Woodside

Year group established	2011
No. of units planned	33
No. of members at time of study	26
No. of households at time of study	19 (7 couples, 12 single women)
Gender split	19 women, 7 men
Age range	56 to 79 (large majority under 70)

Table 9.2 Key figures – Cannock Mill Cohousing

Year group established	2008
No. of units planned	23 (17 houses and 6 flats)
No. of members at time of study	18
No. of households at time of study	12 (6 couples, 1 single man, 5 single women)
Gender split	11 women, 7 men
Age range	55 to 76 (large majority under 70)

to degree level (with more than one to doctoral level), with professions that ranged from a London taxi driver, social and healthcare workers and those in the charitable sector (including international aid workers), and several academics; they are what Savage et al. (2013) might define as the 'technical middle class'. Often, professional skills were brought to bear on the work necessary to develop the co-housing projects themselves: the Cannock Mill group includes four architects, one of whom is the designer of the scheme, with others whose professions have involved community development and public financial administration. Many of the group members remain in full-time or part-time employment, and intend to continue after moving in.

What was perhaps most notable about the membership of both groups, however, was the relative lack of close family: although complete figures for the groups were not available, of the 13 households interviewed 4 had never had children, and among the total 19 interviewees only 3 reported parents still alive.

Methodology

The study comprised 13 in-depth interviews with members of both groups (a total of 19 people, some interviewed as couples), alongside attendance at group meetings and wider co-housing networking events, with interviewees recruited via an open invitation made via a 'gatekeeper' from each group. The semi-structured interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded using an inductive process, with categories evolved to reflect themes as they emerged, although the original interview transcripts were regularly referred back to so as not to lose the original sense or context.

Key theoretical issues

Although having a certain level of economic capital is generally a necessity for developing senior co-housing in the UK at present, this is a qualifying requirement rather than a motivation; after all, many people currently reaching retirement age have significant wealth in the form of housing, but have not chosen to embark on a collaborative housing project. There is a need therefore to understand motivations for senior co-housing in terms of attitudes toward ageing and expectations of later life, and how these fuel such a commitment of time and emotion. Perhaps one of the most under-discussed aspects of senior co-housing is the necessity of relocation from an existing home and neighbourhood to join a small, proximate community in a new and often unfamiliar location.

Thus, in seeking to explore the individual motivations for belonging to such groups, a number of broader theoretical issues will be drawn on. The first is the concept of older people's changing expectations of later life over recent years, often framed by the current phenomenon of the baby boomer generation reaching retirement age. Second is the idea of belonging, both in terms of a particular neighbourhood but also through social ties to a group, and how this relates closely to aspects of social class.

Changing conceptions of later life

Later life, or 'old age', has long been regarded by Western society as a period of physical and mental decline, dependency, economic and social disengagement (Estes et al., 1982). However, an academic understanding of the ageing process has shifted considerably over the last half-century, from a view of decline and dependency in later life as something innate, toward the idea that 'old age' is socially constructed, with what we consider to be 'unavoidable' behaviours and tropes of old age actually fluid and negotiable in myriad ways (Biggs, 2007). If broader society remains ageist in many of its attitudes, there is evidence that older people themselves think differently about what it means to be 'old' (Gilleard, 2008), popularised most notably by the polemical work of Peter Laslett in the late 1980s. Laslett promoted this third age as a 'new' post-retirement life stage, as a period that offers new opportunities for personal fulfilment and productive activity to those who find themselves freed from the bonds of work and child-rearing, but who are yet to suffer the physical or mental decline threatened by very old age (Laslett, 1989). Although criticised for its uneven mix of academic rigour and populism (see, for

instance, Siegel, 1990), the appeal of such ideas might be argued as having represented an empowerment of a social group – those who have reached retirement age – that has previously been regarded as no longer of value in Western society because it is no longer of *economic* value (Higgs, 2013). People in their fifties, sixties and even seventies no longer regard themselves as 'old', rejecting ageist stereotypes and embracing the idea of the third age and its call to 'age successfully' (Biggs et al., 2007; Gilleard, 2008).

It could also be argued that such shifting conceptions about later life are currently most strongly personified by the baby boomer generation: those aged between their mid-fifties and mid-seventies, who fall within the age range represented by those forming the senior co-housing groups explored here. In many ways the use of the term 'boomers' is a shorthand to describe a cohort that is perhaps more diverse than any previously, but that nonetheless grew up through a period of intense social change that has markedly separated them from the behaviour and attitudes of previous generations (Biggs, 2007; Leach et al., 2013; Pruchno, 2012). They are also often framed as the first *consumer* generation (Harkin and Huber, 2004), the term here used in a broader sense than a predilection for spending, rather as a rejection of the social and cultural norms of their parents' generation through an expression of personal tastes and greatly expanded expectations (Phillipson et al., 2008). Others see this as matched by a 'blurring of the generations in terms of identity', in which the boomers attempt to ally themselves far more with members of *successive* generations (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1995).

But for many, conceptions of older people as frail and dependent are increasingly substituted by the idea of a wealthy boomer generation (Phillipson et al., 2008). In the UK, housing wealth is increasingly concentrated among those over 60, at a time when home ownership overall is falling (Rowlingson, 2012; Meen et al., 2016, 244), with 83 per cent of over-sixties owning their own home, most without a mortgage (Wood, 2013). Yet such statistics perhaps hide a more complex picture of inequality: those over 60 include a majority of both the wealthiest but also the poorest in UK society, with great differentials in wealth and income across social class, gender and geographical location, and with home ownership not always equating to a higher income (Rowlingson, 2012). For London and the southeast of England, the period since the mid-1990s has seen unprecedented growth in house prices far beyond inflation; those who bought before this period stepped onto a 'wealth escalator', which exponentially boosted property values, but made them increasingly unaffordable for those who did not (Chamberlain, 2009).

For those many boomers who *can* be considered wealthy, there are shifts in attitude and need that relate to economic capital. There are signs that those in their fifties and sixties might *choose* to expend more of their equity in later life than previous generations (Rowlingson and McKay, 2005), reflecting a broader change in generational attitudes. At the same time, Holmans (2008) notes how living longer – and more years in retirement – means many older people will need to draw on the funds accumulated earlier in life, an increasing amount of which will be on care and health-related costs.

These perspectives on ageing and the cohort currently around retirement age help to situate the members of the two groups in the study here, as potentially having a very different set of attitudes to previous generations of similar age. More specifically, given the current model of senior co-housing in the UK as without any form of public subsidy, they can also be positioned within the context of those who have benefitted from a set of circumstances particular to their generation and especially to the southeast of England, and who might be broadly described as (or at least, numerically dominated by) the property-owning middle classes.

Ageing, middle-class belonging and social bonds

One little-explored aspect of senior co-housing (or indeed co-housing more generally) is the implicit act of relocation, of moving from an existing home and neighbourhood to a new locality to become part of a tight-knit social group. An exploration of the motivations for joining a senior co-housing project therefore raises questions of what role ageing has in changing attitudes toward the places that members live in now, and how this relates to their social networks and connections.

Given that, in the UK at least, ownership of property or other significant capital is a prerequisite for joining senior co-housing, it is not possible to separate these issues of social connection and place from social class. The term is used here in the sense developed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who theorised social class as being produced – and reproduced through successive generations – by a complex interplay of different forms of capital: not just economic but also *social* and *cultural* capital. He defined 'social capital' as the use of resources based on group membership, relationships and networks, and 'cultural capital' as representing the knowledge and skills specific to an individual (Bourdieu, 1986).

There is a body of literature inspired by Bourdieu's conception of social class that does explore the aspects of belonging and place,

specifically how the middle classes often move to and claim a specific urban area or neighbourhood as their own (Butler and Robson, 2003; Savage et al., 2005; Benson and Jackson, 2012; Benson, 2014), and which Savage et al. (2005) describe as 'elective belonging' – a defining of place as having not only functional but also symbolic meaning for them. Benson (2014) explores these concepts of middle-class mobility, belonging and place attachment further in studies of various residential locations in London, portraying how such tactics were used to achieve a 'fit' with their own needs by changing the place in question. But each of these studies is implicitly about an earlier life stage, one where individuals aim to invest economically, socially and culturally for a period during their working lives, where raising families and schooling are perhaps the crucial aspect. How might this compare with those of a similar social class but at a later life stage, who find themselves increasingly outnumbered by younger cohorts? Might the senior co-housing groups examined here to some extent represent those who are no longer able to find a 'fit' with their neighbourhoods, which have become what May and Muir (2015) refer to as 'generationed' places: still a site of dominance of one social group over another, but divided by generation as well as social class?

Central to this lack of fit, it could be argued, is an individual's 'stock' of social capital – in this context the support through friends, family and social networks that changes through different parts of the life course. Kendig et al. (2012) have noted how, as we age, close social ties often diminish; how, as working lives end, it is easy to lose touch: people die; friends and family move away and become more geographically dispersed, leading to isolation.

Thus, an exploration of the motivations of the individuals in the two groups needs to acknowledge how changing needs in later life might result in a changing response to place, examining the degree to which a person is no longer able to 'adapt' a neighbourhood or existing situation to provide the social capital they perceive is needed. Senior co-housing in this context might represent an alternative response to that need.

Changing attitudes, new expectations

Given that members have self-selected into a housing concept in which group sociability is an integral part, it is unsurprising that those interviewed could be described as busy, engaged and socially active, very much an image of the 'young old' or successful agers discussed earlier. It should also be noted of course that the age range straddles a transitional

period; many are still working full- or part-time, while others have no intention of ever fully retiring from some form of work. A number of themes were notable which seemed specific to the groups, or at least that might be considered more pronounced than for members of the same cohort more widely.

One idea frequently repeated was a firm rejection of the choices the interviewees' own parents had taken in later life. Specifically, a sense emerged that the previous generation's fixation on ownership of a family home as an end in itself failed to address what interviewees felt would be more practical for them as they got older. As one male resident from Woodside recalled:

> My parents [were] the sort of people referred to as 'retiring badly'. After me and my sister had already left home, they bought a five-bedroom detached house quite far from either of us, then pointedly refused to move out of it, even when it became completely unsuitable.

There was little sense among the interviewees of attachment to their own homes, at least not to the extent that this outweighed more practical considerations, notably the difficulty of maintaining large properties when set against the possibility of downsizing. And while two couples did make specific mention of arrangements to leave their children some part of their assets, issues of inheritance also never seemed central to members' long-term planning, perhaps the consequence of the research including a disproportionate number of childless individuals. However, members' strong focus on their own plans contrasts with their perception of their own parents' behaviour, and perhaps reflects Rowlingson and McKay's (2005) findings that those in their fifties and sixties are prepared to expend more of their equity in later life than previous generations. Among those who had children, an important idea was that their offspring should not be required to support *them* as they grew older, and they strongly rejected the idea that moving in with their children at some point would be desirable or possible.

A further major factor, as previously noted, was an anticipation of a greater need for economic resources by a generation who are likely to live much longer, with the likelihood of the continuing withdrawal of state care services in the future also undoubtedly playing a part in decisions over housing assets. In this context, it was clear that membership of the group was perceived as a strongly positive move towards avoiding both the potential isolation and the difficulties with day-to-day support needs

that some had witnessed with their own parents. As one interviewee explained:

> We need to be sensible about our old age, you know, if you read all the statistics about things, isolation and loneliness, health and going in and out of hospital … all of these kinds of things. So assuming we live to be 90, it made us think, well, we have to do something about it, and do something proactively. (Female interviewee, Cannock Mill)

This apparent willingness to consider the future practicalities of ageing contrasts perhaps with many people of a similar age, and seems not to reflect the previously discussed tendency in later life to deny or reject the potential negative aspects of ageing. At the same time, specific aspects of declining physical health were generally not discussed (which perhaps was in part due to the nature of a 'one-off' interview setting). It was however sometimes acknowledged that in the case of significant physical or mental incapacity, co-housing would no longer be an option. No clear plans seemed to have emerged for how such issues of 'succession' might work in practice, especially in terms of ownership of each separate home as an asset in the case of future care requirements. Some argue that understanding senior co-housing as a substitute for organised care misses the point however. Baars and Thomése (1994) view the tradition of co-housing groups for older people in the Netherlands as a response to the heterogeneous nature of the boomer generation, who do not fit within a binary system of 'independent life' versus 'care home', arguing, as do others (Brenton, 2011), that it enables older people to resist the *need* for dependency and care.

Thus, it was unsurprising that another common thread in interview discussions was not only a rejection of 'care homes', but an aversion to all forms of retirement housing currently on offer, and which included the product offered by developers such as McCarthy and Stone (whose name, raised by several of the interviewees, seems to be synonymous with all such accommodation). One female Woodside interviewee was typical in commenting that although it was 'alright for my dad', such housing offered her little control in later life where it mattered, concluding that she and her husband 'could end up being forced to live with anyone'.

Despite the fact that central to the senior co-housing concept is a response to the vicissitudes and potential decline of later life that emphasises personal control, there was a reticence among interviewees in

discussing how these issues might unfold in practice. In part, this might reflect the tensions, previously discussed, between the positive connotations of living a third age as opposed to the difficulties of thinking about a fourth, especially in discussion with a researcher in an interview setting. But an overriding impression was of two groups of people sharing the excitement of doing something new, in being part of a shared project with like-minded others. Although interviewees were prompted to speak about what life in the group might be like after moving in, there was considerably more reflection on how the co-housing project offered a chance to reject societal expectations of 'winding down' in later life, and enter a new, active life stage, as part of a group of pioneers:

> I think there's something else going on here which is to do with taking a positive view of getting older. Which is our issue, we're going to show people how it's done, it's pioneering, that's the underlying thing. (Female resident, Cannock Mill)

While these 'pioneering' attitudes may on the one hand represent a challenge to a perceived apathy among their cohort, or wider societal ageism, there was also a strong sense of a specific shared culture that had helped maintain group cohesion over prolonged planning and development periods typical for such projects. Members quickly recognised in each other broadly shared progressive politics, if not necessarily a shared party political affiliation, as one male interviewee from Woodside related of his group:

> You will find most people in the group are old lefties and read the *Guardian* … it is self-selecting politically with a small 'p'. You won't find many *Daily Mail* readers. I think you need that sort of sympathy and certainly when we had a social event a while back, it was interesting that so many of us had separate but very similar experiences, and we all sort of coalesced in the same point.

But these shared values came across most strongly in the context of housing, unsurprising given that the groups have come together through a mutual housing project. Interviewees took a very positive view of communal forms of living, with many having thought about the idea in the past, with several having lived in some sort of communal arrangement beyond their student days. One male Woodside resident described how the group discovered 'quite a strong history of activism and community involvement' and that this had helped bind the group together socially

through the various development challenges, where 'the aims and objectives of the group represent what you still believe in'.

These shared ideas around housing also included a critique of what interviewees perceived as a problematic culture of home ownership in the UK in comparison with other countries. Several interviewees acknowledged the irony that all group members had benefitted from the disproportionate rise in property values in recent decades: all those interviewed (and, it is understood, all members of both groups) owned their existing homes with either no or minimal mortgages, while many had second homes. One owned several properties as a semi-professional landlord. Further, the ease with which property had been acquired in the period prior to the 1990s was also striking, with stories of cheap pre-gentrified areas where landlords were keen to sell unprofitable houses, mortgage tax relief and easily available loans.

But the broader shared thinking about housing, especially where it is focused on how older people might live together in co-housing, has led to a feeling of 'pioneer status' among both the groups, which in some ways they felt had isolated them from wider society; some interviewees jokingly referred to how friends and family regarded them as 'hippies' or 'a bit mad'. Some had even elected not to inform others of their plans at all. One interviewee related how this sense of separateness was reflected in prejudice from the media, where they felt often misrepresented as 'an alternative form of care home', but also by friends:

> our friends … they find it scary, they don't want to acknowledge that we're getting old. Yes, we're getting old, but wouldn't it be good to have a different kind of lifestyle? Do we have to try and emulate everyone else? (Female resident, Cannock Mill)

In summary, the two groups can be depicted as having attitudes and expectations that in many ways reflect their generation but especially their broadly similar social backgrounds, including the benefit of often significant housing wealth that has allowed them to consider their respective co-housing projects (although it is important to acknowledge that, even then, the Woodside group's assets could not match the rising development costs).

At the same time, there are shared attitudes and expectations that on the one hand suggest the very epitome of 'successful agers', but on the other represent a set of ideas that might be considered particularly forward-thinking, seeing themselves in many ways as different from their cohort, as pioneers. It is certainly true that there is not only a willingness

to think about some of the vicissitudes of later life, but a perhaps unusual readiness to use their existing housing assets to pool resources in what they hope will be a successful model for a better later life, especially in light of what they fairly imagine will be a declining level of public care services as demand increases.

Notwithstanding such progressive attitudes, senior co-housing projects remain a huge commitment, especially given the dearth of practical examples to follow, in the UK at least. Also as previously noted, the process of how the formation of such groups actually plays out and is intertwined with the negotiation of ageing in terms of place and social connection has been little studied, and is the focus of the section below.

Ageing, belonging and social connection

As previously noted, an overlooked aspect of creating a senior (or indeed multi-generational) co-housing community is the implicit need, for most members, to give up existing homes and neighbourhoods in favour of a new life with fellow co-housing members who are not always established friends, in a new location. This section therefore considers some of the data from the interviews in light of the themes of place, social class and belonging discussed earlier, and how these relate to the ageing process and motivations for joining a senior co-housing group.

It was quickly apparent in many interviews that there was little emotional attachment to members' own homes. But also, often striking was the lack of attachment to, or engagement with, an existing neighbourhood. In part, this might be a reflection of the smaller number of children and thus lower likelihood of having raised families locally (and, as is not unusual among the urban professional classes, very few had themselves grown up in the area where they now lived). Yet even among those with children – the majority of interviewees, after all – there was a notable lack of connection; a few regarded where they currently lived as the result of compromises made, for instance, because of children's education. One male resident from the Woodside group was not alone in his reservations about the area he had lived in for many years, describing his suburban neighbours as 'a bit dead from the neck up, cleaning their cars, talking about house prices, reading the *Daily Mail*'. Others had no strong opinion on their locality at all, at times because they were often elsewhere: in more than one case, children had grown up locally for a

period, but one or both parents living and working abroad for several years had resulted in fewer social links locally, with the home as a 'base' to return to at different periods of their lives.

In terms of 'social capital' – existing networks of friends and family – there was a distinct sense of dislocation, which interviewees perceived as potentially growing into problems of isolation as they got older. Several related stories of how friends had died or moved to distant locations, and thus of lack of close social ties in any useful, local sense. A female interviewee from the Woodside group, who has lived with severe disability since she was young, already appreciated 'how difficult life can become, in terms of not being able to travel, to see friends. I can't get around the neighbourhood … it's very hard to visit. Life can get very isolated, without you realising it.'

There were exceptions, most notably a couple who had strong local social connections acquired mainly through bringing up young children in the area, and were ambivalent about leaving their neighbourhood of many years (and even more so about leaving London for Colchester). As they reflected on this, however, it became clear that on balance the chance of realising a successful co-housing group 'trumped' these other reservations; there was also a realisation that their own life stage was no longer a fit with their locale:

> As an older person, I don't feel I need to stay around. You know, [daughter and her partner] are so passionate about Brockley, they have a baby, and there's all these people having babies. But really, I want to be somewhere which permits me to be a senior person.

Thus, although several interviewees still felt positively about the places where they lived in many ways, there was broad agreement that as they grew older members were finding it an increasing problem to make or maintain social connection locally. This seems to stand in stark contrast to the phenomenon described by Benson (2014), where an in-migration of middle-class residents worked to remake and define their neighbourhood as a 'place of the mind', through which to engage in the social reproduction of their own social class through raising families in a socially supportive environment. Rather, it seems closer to 'generationed' places (May and Muir, 2015), dominated by younger cohorts who have achieved and are maintaining a better 'fit' with their environment. In this context, the interviewees could be considered 'temporal migrants' (Westerhof, 2010) who are no longer able to maintain social ties and cultural connections that had previously been possible through work, children and

school systems, or through local social activities predominantly associated with younger people.

Thus, it could be argued that the focus of the two groups is responding to a deficit of social capital as they grow older, specifically by developing the 'bridging' social ties that individual members possess through shared backgrounds and attitudes. From this perspective, their respective co-housing projects represent a site where they hope to build the 'bonding' ties that they anticipate will help support each other in later life, crucially, in a close, proximate community.

Conclusion and emerging issues

Senior co-housing as it emerges in the UK appears to offer a very positive response to the increasing problems of loneliness, isolation and consequent strain on services that are forecast as the outcome of an ageing population. In the absence of completed developments, however, this study has presented an examination of the character and motivations of two nascent groups as they progress their plans. While the development of co-housing schemes presents numerous challenges – not least the self-funding issues that have already effectively meant the end of Cohousing Woodside – the focus of the study here has been on the broader motivations and social implications of such plans.

The picture that has emerged is of two groups who position themselves as pioneers of a new, socially engaged approach to later life, hoping to create momentum for senior co-housing as a realistic option for more older people, with group members keen to help shift perceptions of older people from images of dependency to a model that allows them to be fully in charge of the later part of their lives. While on the one hand they could be seen as reflecting the changing perceptions of older age personified by their generation, they are also defined as groups by a relatively specific set of shared cultural attitudes and politics, remaining unusual perhaps in their willingness to address practical decisions about housing and social connection in later life that most people prefer not to think about.

More problematically, both groups could be regarded as representing a part of the population very specific to their time and place: a distinct intersection of a small but significant middle-class group who have benefitted, like many in certain parts of the UK, from the disproportionate rise in property values over recent decades. They are also individuals who have acknowledged a deficit in their close social ties as they age,

exacerbated in part by noticeably fewer offspring or close family than the norm, even for the relatively mobile middle class. This deficit in social capital is closely related to their changing relationship with members' individual neighbourhoods, which have changed over time as they have grown older. In several cases, there has always been a lack of close social ties locally. Many felt they had been 'aged out' of their neighbourhoods, contrasting strongly with literature portraying the middle classes as most able to move to and dominate place through different tactics. Thus, for them, co-housing represents a chance to develop social capital in the form of strong social ties, and to bring these together where they will be most useful as they age: in the form of a *physically proximate* group, in short, a tightly defined new neighbourhood.

This relocation and formation of a new – effectively exclusive – community does in turn raise other issues, however. Despite limited literature on co-housing, and senior co-housing in particular, some argue that the inherent close-knit nature of co-housing, together with its thus-far privately funded nature in the UK, creates the risk of senior co-housing becoming a form of gated community (Chiodelli, 2015a, 2015b). Several of the interviewees in fact raised the issue, albeit refuting the idea that this might be an outcome in practice. At the same time, there was an acknowledgement that the cohesion of the group rested on more than simply mutual support to help maintain each other's physical and mental health, as one interviewee commented when discussing the screening process for new applicants:

> people are applying now just to ensure they're not on their own at the end, we're not screening closely enough to see what they actually add to the group. We're not looking for people who have the money, and are just inoffensive. We want people who are intellectually curious. (Female resident, Cannock Mill)

In Denmark, where senior co-housing is well established in both social and private forms, Pedersen (2015) notes how the latter has become relatively exclusive, sought-after by the middle classes for the quality of the housing rather than communitarian principles. There *is* evidence of more socially mixed groups where senior co-housing is publicly funded (Ruiu 2015), most notably in the Netherlands (Bouma and Voorbij, 2009). But the latter study also detected conflict within groups at an early stage where, because of local authority allocation processes, groups were not able to choose their own members. Attention is thus drawn to what is perhaps a fundamental tension around the concept of the intentional

community of like-minded individuals – a problem echoed by other studies (Baars and Thomése, 1994; Brenton, 1998).

Yet there is no reason in principle that senior co-housing groups should be the exclusive preserve of the middle classes. Although it may well be that professional middle-class groups are more lacking in the forms of proximate social connectedness and friendship that co-housing offers, problems of loneliness and isolation in later life are clearly not restricted to this particular group. Further, the idea of community-led, community-based 'alternative' housing is by no means an exclusively middle-class one: the co-operative housing movement in the UK, as perhaps the most widespread form of democratically managed housing, is open to all forms of tenure, and is most often based on tenancy rather than ownership models (CCH, 2016).

Further, potential demand might also be wider than senior co-housing's current numerically insignificant numbers suggest, as very few people have so far encountered the idea. A recent BBC short film on the OWCH group moving into the first UK senior co-housing development was shared more than 60,000 times, with the essence of many of the some 3,000 overwhelmingly positive comments being 'I've never heard of such a thing, where can I find more information?' (BBC, 2016). In this context, and given widespread forecasts of a rapidly ageing population overtaking the capacity of social care services, the concept of self-managed collaborative housing developments for older people could be regarded as an *essential* component of future social care policy.

10

Something wonderful in my back yard: the social impetus for group self-building

Emma Heffernan and Pieter de Wilde

The housing crisis in the United Kingdom, as Barker (2004) identifies, has become shorthand for a chronic lack of suitable and affordable housing – in both the home ownership and rental sectors – and the undersupply and diminishment of social housing stock (Barker, 2004; Jefferys et al., 2014). What has also become clear is that the mainstream housebuilding sector – speculative housing development – has not risen to the task of ameliorating this crisis. Consequently, there is increasing marginalisation within the housing and land economy, with many people finding that their housing needs cannot be met by the sector. This chapter focuses on the experiences and perceptions of those who have been involved in group self-build projects, where households are involved in the design and/or production of homes, either by arranging for their construction or building homes themselves within a group of three or more households (see also Duncan and Rowe, 1993). Against the background of the UK's housing crisis, this focus is particularly timely, as such group self-build projects are widely promoted as offering a route into housing that runs counter to these conditions.

An introductory note on group self-build

It is clear there are many ways of organising and managing a group self-build. Wallace et al. (2013a) provide a comprehensive list – while also noting that these different modes of delivery might overlap – that includes co-housing, eco-development, self-build for rent, sweat equity and community land trust.

- *Co-housing*, first developed in Denmark in 1972 (McCamant and Durrett, 1988). Co-housing groups commonly employ professionals to design and construct their homes and facilities. Within a co-housing scheme, each household typically has its own private home, and a common house for communal facilities is also provided.
- *Eco-developments* are planned sustainable communities. The construction of the homes is not necessarily carried out by the self-builders (instead, professionals may be appointed), but the self-builders will have an input into the design of the homes and community (Wallace et al., 2013a).
- Typically organised by a housing association, *self-build for rent* is a model whereby tenants receive training opportunities and/or reduced rent as payback for being involved in the construction of their home (Wheat, 2001). The unpaid labour provided by the tenants serves to reduce the overall build cost and therefore allows rents for the homes to be reduced.
- Within the *sweat equity model*, self-builders commit to a certain number of hours per week in the construction of their home. When the home is complete, they own a share in it (Wallace et al., 2013a).
- A *community land trust (CLT)* is a not-for-profit organisation owned and controlled by the community and run by volunteers (National CLT Network, 2012). Its purpose is to develop housing or other community assets that remain affordable in perpetuity.
- A *contractor/developer-enabled scheme* typically involves a local authority or developer offering serviced plots on their land, possibly as part of a larger development (Wallace et al., 2013a).
- *Contractor/developer-led schemes* characteristically offer the self-builder a choice of plots and designs for their home on a multi-unit site (Wallace et al., 2013a). Self-builders are also typically offered choice in terms of their level of involvement in constructing/finishing the home.

For the purpose of this chapter, all of these categories and models are considered as group self-build housing, and the projects with which interviewees were involved encompass a range of these. The reasons for the authors' focus on *group* self-build include the limited research on this mode of housing procurement and the mismatch between the potential of group self-build to offer housing at a similar scale of development to speculative housing – thus meeting unmet demand – and the very small proportion of new homes built through group self-build. Against this

background, this chapter explores group self-build in greater detail from the point of view of those who have experienced it.

Group self-build motivations

Wallace et al. (2013a) suggest that group self-build projects are typically formed around strong individuals with very strong motivations to achieve the project aim. They also assert that such groups attract people with common values and beliefs, typically regarding such topics as community, affordability and environmental sustainability. In the context of the German *Baugruppen*, groups are believed to form in one of two ways: either a pre-existing group of friends deciding to build together, or under professional leadership (Hamiduddin and Gallent, 2016). Wallace et al. (2013a) suggest that there is often a focus on providing access to housing for local people within their own community, and that developments are characteristically small in scale, using unique development models each time with little replication of successful models.

The UK government's current support for the self-build sector lies in its status as a potentially resilient supply of housing (Barlow et al., 2001; Brown et al., 2013; Parvin et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2013a). While during recession the level of activity amongst speculative housebuilders is reduced, a move in line with their concerns to deliver profit (Callcutt, 2007), the self-build sector continues to build homes because these are built by an occupant to live in rather than for immediate sale (Parvin et al., 2011). This sector is also more agile, better able to make sites that are smaller and more difficult to develop viable (Brown et al., 2013).

From the point of view of the household, self-build housing improves choice (Barlow et al., 2001; Brown et al., 2013; Griffith, 2011; Parvin et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2013a). By building a home that meets the needs of the occupants, the level of satisfaction with the home is significantly increased (Parvin et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2013), while also producing a home of a higher quality (Barlow et al., 2001; Miles and Whitehouse, 2013; RIBA, 2009). Barlow et al. (2001) report that 'getting more for their money' either in terms of quality or quantity is a significant motivation for many self-builders. According to Brown et al. (2013), savings of 20–30 per cent on build cost can be achieved through self-build models of procurement, with group self-build projects having the potential to deliver even greater savings, through the benefits of economies of

scale. This accords with the German context where group self-builders typically make savings of 20 per cent when compared to individual self-build (Hamiduddin and Daseking, 2014).

Barlow et al. (2001) observe that self-builders often incorporate technical innovations within their homes. Enhanced energy efficiency is cited by many as a benefit of self-build homes (Brown et al., 2013; DCLG, 2011; NaSBA, 2011; Parvin et al., 2011). Because self-builders have a long-term interest in the home they are building, decisions that impact on both the capital cost and the running costs of a home can be considered on a whole-life basis. Therefore, investing in enhanced energy performance becomes a sensible option for a self-builder both in terms of their comfort and finances (Parvin et al., 2011). A qualitative study of Danish co-housing (Marckmann et al., 2012) found that self-builders were very focused on the inclusion of sustainable technologies and, to a lesser extent, also on the sustainable everyday practices of the residents. However, the environmental consequences of the size of their homes was notably absent in their discussions, despite the fact that the floor area of a home has been found to be a significant factor in its overall energy consumption (Gram-Hanssen, 2011). There is a propensity for individual self-build homes to be large detached dwellings, which, as a less dense form of development, has a negative impact in the broader sense of sustainability (Dol et al., 2012). Therefore, although individual self-builders may focus on the improved energy performance of their home, there also needs to be broader consideration of the scale and nature of the development. This is perhaps more feasible with group forms of self-build where a community is being built (Wallace et al., 2013a).

It is asserted that motivations to group self-build 'tend to be influenced by micro factors around personal and community values, rather than macro factors related to the broader economy and social trends' (Wallace et al., 2013a, 42); community is a primary motivation within group self-build projects (Benson, 2014). Previous research found that group self-build offered the benefit of building a community through the process of building homes (Benson, 2014; Broer and Titheridge, 2010; Brown et al., 2013; Wallace et al., 2013a). Hamiduddin and Gallent (2016) attribute this to individuals with shared purpose engaging in building a place for that community to continue to develop. Indeed, it is also suggested that this pathway of development leads to strong social relationships (Hamiduddin and Daseking, 2014). Group self-building has been found to offer the benefit of being a good place to bring up children (Broer and Titheridge, 2010) and to provide an affordable housing

solution for those 'who find themselves marginal to the housing market' (Benson, 2014, 21). Benefits that facilitate further the affordability of group self-build housing include sharing the costs of land, construction and professional fees; pooling of knowledge and skills, and potential sweat equity trading; reduced individual risk through aggregation; and savings on construction overheads by operating as a single client (Parvin et al., 2011). Despite these hopes for the affordability offered by group self-build, in the German context the *Baugruppen* model was found not to be appropriate for low-income households. Instead, it suited a niche market of middle-income households who, although they could not afford to undertake an individual self-build, could secure a mortgage for a group build (Hamiduddin and Gallent, 2016).

Whilst a body of knowledge exists on the wider self-build sector, this review of the literature highlights a gap in terms of the experiences and opinions of group self-builders in the UK. The literature has suggested that a desire to remain or become a part of a community is often central to the motivations of would-be group self-builders, but this is not underpinned by empirical research. This chapter investigates the experience-based opinions of group self-builders in relation to the motivations for and benefits of group self-build housing, with a focus on the social aspects of group self-build housing.

Understanding group self-build experiences

The empirical research comprised a series of 11 in-depth interviews with people who either were planning or had completed a group self-build scheme in England. Interviewees were selected purposively, with participants being recruited through online self-build forums; via self-build intermediaries; and through direct approaches to group self-build schemes, both planned and completed. Social media, including Twitter and Facebook, were also used to engage with the group self-build community.

The method of analysis adopted here is the housing pathways approach. Clapham argues that many perspectives on housing 'assume simple and universal household attitudes and motivations' (Clapham, 2005, 34). By considering the housing pathway of each household interviewed within this study, it is possible to understand the individual meanings of those households and how those meanings have translated into actions over time. Further, it is also possible to identify where individual pathways converge to form common pathways.

Group self-builder profiles

The 11 interviewees were involved in nine different group self-build schemes. Nearly half of these schemes had developed independently, through grassroots action (four), a further two schemes had become more autonomous after beginning as supported schemes. One interviewee was from a housing association-led scheme (as developer) in which the group self-build homes were being purchased off-plan at slightly reduced open market rates. One independent group had initially tried to find a development partner with whom to work, but had become frustrated with that process and the group had thus determined to proceed independently. Each interviewee either chose or was allocated a pseudonym. Figure 10.1 shows the profiles of the different interviewees in matrix format.

Given the small sample size and the purposive sampling techniques used, it is not possible to conclude that these characteristic data are representative of the group self-build sector. However, these data merit discussion in the light of existing profiles of (primarily individual) self-builders within the literature.

The interviewees in this study ranged from the 26–35 age group to the 56–65 age group, with the greatest concentration in the 26–35 group (four). This concentration in the younger age bracket is of note when the findings of Wallace et al.'s (2013b) survey of 580 self-builders (the significant majority of whom were individual self-builders) are considered; only 6 per cent of respondents in the previous study were within the 26–35 age category. Further, Benson asserts that:

> The 'typical selfbuilding household' consists of two people, often a married couple, aged between 40–69, with above average annual incomes, education of degree level and beyond … prior property ownership and housing assets are significant in becoming a self-builder. (2014, 2)

This stereotype profile considers not only age, but also household structure, income and education; it relates almost exclusively to individual self-builders, and concurs with several previous studies (e.g. Barlow et al., 2001; Brown, 2008; Wallace et al., 2013b).

Within the current study, four of the interviewees out of 11 either lived on their own, or were single parents. All four of these interviewees were female. In her social, geographical and political exploration of

| | | Interviewee pseudonym | | | | | | | | | |
		Alison	Beth	Colin	Derek	Edward	Freddie	Grace	Helen	Sarah	Jess	Kathy
Age group	25 and under											
	26–35		●				●	●			●	
	36–45				●				●			
	46–55	●				●						●
	56–65			●						●		
	66–75											
	76 and over											
No. in household	1							●				●
	2	●	●	●			●		●	●		
	3+				●	●					●	
Household structure	Single							●				●
	Couple		●	●			●			●		
	Single parent family	●							●			
	Nuclear family				●	●					●	
Route to self-build	Independent	○	○	●	●	●			●		●	●
	Developer-led									●		
	Supported	●	●				●	●				
Model of group self-build	Co-housing				●	●				●	●	●
	Eco-development											
	Self-build for rent											
	Sweat equity	●	●			●	●	●	●			
	CLT	●	●			●	●	●	●			
Project stage	Planning to group self-build	●	●	●		●			●	●		
	Completed group self-build				●		●	●			●	●
Tenure	Affordable	●	●			●	●	●	●			
	Open market			●	●					●	●	●

○   Indicates a scheme which began as a supported scheme and has since developed to be a primarily independent group.

Figure 10.1   Interviewee profile matrix

eco-homes (which fall within the self-build spectrum), Pickerill (2016) analyses gender identity and gender relations within their development. She finds that women are typically excluded from construction through cultural practices, judgments are made about their capacities and capabilities, and their input is often undervalued. Indeed, across the cases she studied there was a stereotype that 'men build houses and women make homes' (Pickerill, 2016, 174). Yet within this study are examples

of women choosing to build themselves and their children a home, an uncommon pathway.

The interviewee characteristics within the current study are therefore suggestive that those households attracted to the group self-build pathway might differ significantly from those that follow the individual self-build pathway. In Germany, the *Baugruppen* model has proven popular with households comprising younger couples with dependents (Hamiduddin and Gallent, 2016). Brown et al. (2013) postulate that potential 'collective custom builders' (another moniker for a group self-builder) can be broadly categorised as either '[o]lder, more affluent households … commonly referred to as "Empty-Nesters" or "Baby Boomers" … [and] [y]ounger, less affluent households for whom access to housing is currently limited, and for whom motivation stems from economic need and the prospect of cost-savings' (Brown et al., 2013, 37). Thus, whilst the younger and less affluent demographic profile of the group self-builders within the current study supports this postulation, with the addition of female leadership and alternative household structures (single-parent households), this study identifies even greater diversity in the households following the group self-build pathway.

Despite the increased diversity of group self-build, several interviewees expressed disappointment that their community was not as diverse as it might have been, generally due to financial constraints. Therefore, although the group self-build pathway appears to attract a more diverse cohort than individual models, limits of inclusivity exist. This has potential implications for social sustainability.

Common characteristics of group self-build

Interviewees were encouraged to describe the nature of their own project, from which common characteristics of group self-build have been identified. A common assertion was that group self-builders were typically community-minded people: 'The people you meet that want to group self-build, they're great people, they're really nice groups, [names two groups] and I'm sure all the others too, they're just nice, they're community-minded people' (Alison). This aligns with the findings of Wallace et al. (2013a), who assert that self-build groups attract people with common values and beliefs, and that these values are often regarding topics such as community.

Group self-build schemes typically rely on different members of the group bringing a variety of skills to the project:

What is good about the group is obviously some of us, our skills might be more now, the initial setting up and doing all the admin. But other people's skills are going to come in when it's building … So I think that's good that the skills will be mixed and shared. (Beth)

Despite this, it is worth being mindful of Hamiduddin and Gallent's (2016) caution that groups may not bring together all necessary resources and thus may need to bring in missing skills.

Within sweat equity models of group self-build, it is common for there to be a requirement for all homes to be completed before any can be inhabited:

The good thing was that every house had to be completed before anyone moved in, so it kept at a certain level. So no one else was running away putting the curtains up while matey down there was still trying to fit the kitchen. (Freddie)

This supports the literature in which it is stated that this requirement is commonly used to overcome potential issues of group members not contributing equally in terms of time and effort (Wallace et al., 2013a).

Benefits of group self-build

In discussing their experiences of either planning or completing a group self-build scheme, interviewees identified several benefits. These are shown in Figure 10.2 and have been grouped into two categories: personal benefits and broader benefits. Some of the benefits have been identified as serving both as personal and broader benefits and are therefore shown bridging the two categories.

These personal benefits were identified by interviewees from sweat equity models of group self-build, in which the self-builders were more 'hands-on'. Interviewees identified the opportunity to develop new skills and knowledge as a personal benefit of group self-building:

Personal benefits		Broader benefits
Develop skills and knowledge		Builds community
Empowering	Financial accessibility / High build quality	Environmental sustainability
Pride – sense of ownership		Supports local economy

Figure 10.2 Identified benefits of group self-build housing

> To know that you're living in a place that you really created. I mean in that sense, as a life experience, it's fantastic; that's one of the reasons that I want to do it, it's very empowering, isn't it? And to know that you can sort out your housing problem and give yourself a home for life and learn amazing new skills… (Alison, age range 46–55)

The literature suggests self-builders have the potential to gain employment because of the new skills developed (NaSBA, 2013). However, the following quotations illustrate divergent views regarding the potential for future employment:

> I wouldn't feel that I could tip up to a building site and go 'Can I have a job?' [laughs] unless it was labouring – I'm pretty good at that! But I think … we're definitely much more able to just get on and do things now that need doing around the house or in the garden. But I don't think anyone has actually retrained as a result of this. (Grace, age range 26–35)

> The learning curve's been amazing; I have learnt so many things. Because I didn't know anything about planning, business management, you know, a lot of things I've learnt a lot about in the past couple of years, but it's been good for leading onto other types of employment afterwards as well. (Helen, age range 36–45)

We argue that this divergence in opinions is due to Helen considering the potential for applying transferable skills or for employment in the broader development sector, because she is part of an independent group and is involved in a broad range of tasks such as planning negotiations and funding applications. Conversely, Grace is possibly considering only the potential for employment on a building site, because she was part of a supported group self-build and was only involved in the project after the site had been acquired and planning permission granted. While she can see a benefit in her confidence and ability to tackle construction and maintenance tasks, she cannot envisage this leading to employment opportunities.

The benefits of empowerment and pride were identified only by female interviewees. One possible reason for this is that the construction industry is one of the most male-dominated industries in the UK (Fielden et al., 2000). Indeed, the Office for National Statistics found that whilst around 20 per cent of architects, town planners and building surveyors and around 9 per cent of engineering professionals in the UK are female, the ratio of female construction workers on site is significantly lower (less than 2

per cent of construction and building trades) (ONS, 2015). Given Pickerill's (2016) findings that cultural practices exclude women from construction, female group self-builders are therefore likely to commence a project with the perception that, as a woman and an amateur, they are ill-equipped for the task ahead. Thus, when they successfully complete their project, they feel empowered and proud of their achievement against adversity. Amateur male self-builders may also have felt similarly proud and empowered based on a previous lack of experience, but might not have acknowledged these emotions, or may not have felt comfortable discussing them in an interview with a female researcher. However, the ingrained stereotype that 'men build houses' very probably smooths their path into self-building. Whilst the finding that group self-build has the potential to be empowering aligns with the wider literature (Burgess et al., 2010), the relationship between gender and empowerment within group self-build is elucidated here.

Interviewees believed that a further benefit of group self-build homes is that they are likely to be of high build quality because self-builders take pride in their work (see also Miles and Whitehouse, 2013; RIBA, 2009):

> [A housing association] came when it was finished and a lot of them were saying that the standard of the build is actually much higher than they've seen from contractors. So that was super nice to know … but then I think that's connected with having a pride in what you're doing, because it's for you and for your community. But it was nice to get compliments on that because everybody was absolutely trying to do [their best]. (Grace, age range 26–35)

A number of interviewees stated that the process of group self-building builds a community, thus confirming findings from previous research (Benson, 2014; Broer and Titheridge, 2010; Parvin et al., 2011):

> A year seeing each other every week, you know, 20 hours a week or whatever and all trying to get to the same goal and all trying to deal with the same problems … I mean it does build that community. (Freddie, age range 26–35)

Within the literature, it has further been suggested that the benefit of community interaction extends beyond the group self-build development to the wider neighbourhood community (Broer and Titheridge, 2010; Brown et al., 2013). This was delightfully exemplified in a letter published in the *The Times* about one of the schemes covered by the research. A neighbour of that scheme wrote to express his delight that people were

taking this grassroots action within his rural community, referring to it as 'something wonderful in my back yard' (SWIMBY) as opposed to the more commonly held opinion of 'not in my back yard' (NIMBY).

Many interviewees believed that group self-build offers the benefit of being more environmentally sustainable than other forms of housing development:

> I think if you're the sort of person who's going to be interested in a self-build, you're also the sort of person who's interested in having the responsibility to look after the environment a bit more. (Grace, age range 26–35)

> Because of the particular wants of the people, you'll be building to a very low energy/high spec, in a way that a commercial developer wouldn't do. (Colin, age range 56–65)

However, although many interviewees aspired to environmental sustainability within their schemes, other priorities were often decided to be of greater importance, and they were willing to compromise on the environmental sustainability of their schemes, as exemplified by this quote from a member of a completed co-housing scheme: 'It was a belief that it was a way of introducing social sustainability into housing, and I wanted to have ecological building, but like I say, I was willing to compromise on that one at the time' (Derek, age range 36–45). Interviewees stated that a further benefit of group self-build is that it supports the local economy, confirming the suggestion that self-builders are more likely to operate locally, employing local tradespeople and consultants and utilising local builders' merchants (NaSBA, 2013).

The financial accessibility of group self-build was identified as a primary benefit by the interviewees:

> To be eligible, really, you're in the position you're renting, you haven't bought, you haven't got loads of money, because self-builds normally require huge amounts of money … it's a £5,000 deposit and that's it, that's your only costs … which is something that's reachable for lots of people. (Alison, age range 46–55)

This is in agreement with Benson (2014), who asserts that group self-build offers an affordable housing solution to those marginalised by the housing market. Whilst affordability is suggested as a benefit within the broader self-build literature (e.g. Falk and Carley, 2012; NaSBA, 2013),

the two concepts, affordability and financial accessibility, are believed to be distinct from each other. The affordability discussed in the wider literature often relates to reduced running costs resulting from enhanced environmental sustainability and reduced capital costs as a result of saving the cost of developers' overheads and profit through the self-builder building or managing the project, whereas the financial accessibility identified within this study refers to group self-build offering the only solution to home ownership for many working people.

Motivations for group self-build

The motivations for group self-building identified by the interviewees have been grouped into two categories: personal motivations and broader motivations (Figure 10.3). Hamiduddin and Gallent (2016) assert that the motivations of the household inform the subsequent housing pathway.

Affordability was a central motivation for the interviewees involved in affordable group self-build schemes using the sweat equity model:

> It's a financial thing. If you're working but you're not earning a lot of money, you're in the gap – you're definitely not impoverished, but at the same time, you aren't able to save … you think 'Am I going to be able to get on this property ladder, at all, ever?' (Grace, age range 26–35)

The above quote from Grace highlights a similarity with the German *Baugruppen* model popular amongst middle-income households. Grace also expressed unease that there were people who may need the housing as much as her, but who were in a worse financial position and thus could not access this housing pathway:

Personal motivations		Broader motivations
Avoid poor-quality housing		Environmental sustainability
House to meet needs		Morals
Housing security	Affordability	
Only route to home ownership	Community	
Personal investment		
Place to bring up children		
Quality of life		

Figure 10.3 Identified motivations for group self-build housing

There were definitely people who would have qualified who wouldn't have been able to get finance, so it's great if you're one of the people who can, but it does make you feel slightly conflicted actually because you think 'well actually, I'm in a better position than these people and these people still haven't got housing'.

The motivations of affordability and to stay within one's own community were commonly linked by interviewees:

We can't afford to live in the communities that we work in, which is not … on a sustainability thing, yes we could go and buy a house in Whitleigh, but it's not my community, it's not the school that my kids go to, it's not the school they've grown up in. (Edward, age range 46–55)

Other motivations under the theme of community related to wanting to be part of an intentional community. This quote from Colin, a member of a planned co-housing group, when asked about his motivations for self-building, highlights this point as well as the potential for broader environmental sustainability:

Well, a sense of community, but also the idea of having low-energy housing, the idea of, if you like, the environmental benefits of not everyone having, you know … of sharing some things basically, possibly a car pool, possibly a laundry facility…

Many interviewees identified community as a key motivation for group self-building. This broad motivation included: being close with your neighbours, returning to or staying within your own community, sharing, and the need for a diversity of households to sustain a community.

There's not any affordable housing round here and, like in all the villages in Devon, there's no affordable housing, and I don't see how they can sustain a community life when the only people that can afford it are retired or very high earners. (Beth, age range 26–35)

It was really emotional, totally emotional to think that I might be able to come home and live at home and have that sort of sense of community. (Grace, age range 26–35)

Whilst this broadly aligns with the literature in which community is identified as one of the three primary motivations (Wallace et al., 2013a;

Benson, 2014), the housing pathways of the interviewees give greater depth of understanding of this motivation.

A series of personal motivations were identified by the interviewees, these are: avoiding poor quality housing, having a house which meets their needs, housing security, only route to home ownership, personal investment, a place to bring up children, and quality of life. Helen is a single mother who is a director of an independent affordable group self-build project. Her primary motivation is to avoid poor quality housing and live in a suitable environment in which to bring up her child:

> Motivation is years of bad landlords and mouldy houses [laughs], and having a son … I just think living on a lower wage bracket, I think it's not fair, you shouldn't have to put up with that.

Alison is also a single mother, living in a one-bedroom house with her preschool-aged child. She is a director of a supported affordable group self-build project and her motivations are the desire for a house that meets her family's needs. She also reiterated the motivation of housing security and stability: 'I live in a house with no garden and one bedroom and really want to live in a nice place. And also just don't want to keep moving; I just can't do that.'

Interviewees from groups using the sweat equity model identified group self-build as the only route to home ownership. At the time of self-building, Freddie, who was 33, had moved home over 35 times in his life, hence both a desire and need for stability and housing security. As he described,

> It was the only way in, only way into the housing market. I'd pretty much given up on owning or getting a mortgage … Rental was tricky as well because there just weren't the properties any more, so having to move quite a lot. And over time, I mean I've moved 35 something times, throughout my life … it was constantly trying to find somewhere that was rentable on the wages that I was bringing in and that was still in the area that I was brought up in and want to stay in.

Wallace et al. (2013a) stress that motivations for group self-builders tend to concern micro factors, such as the personal motivations we identify through the quotations above. However, the complex nature of the housing market means that many of these seemingly personal motivations in fact stem from the conditions of the wider housing and land

economy, poor quality housing and housing insecurity. Recognising the structural conditions within which these personal troubles arise is therefore an important intervention into understandings of the value of group self-build both to the people undertaking it and as a solution to these widespread housing issues.

Indeed, this was clearly articulated by one of our interviewees. Her moral stance against the current operations of the housing market was her primary motivation for pursuing an affordable group self-build model:

> I don't really agree with the housing market as it is and I don't really agree that housing is for making profit. And I think that the way that it works at the moment is not sustainable. So that was my main driver really, is to try and find a way that is more sustainable, and is about making homes which are for future generations really … and more of a kind of social responsibility towards that. (Beth, age range 26–35)

The social sustainability Beth promotes encompasses motivations of affordability and community in ways that extend beyond individualised motivations. Her assertion is underpinned by a commitment to thinking about how the housing market might function differently; '[W]hile it is not always the case, community-led housing may also include a commitment to a different ideology about the relationship between housing and wealth' (Benson, 2014, 21).

Edward, a director of an independent affordable group self-build scheme, asserted that environmental sustainability is a primary motivation for their group. He also relates this to a motivation for an improved quality of life:

> We've always said that we want to build environmentally friendly, sustainable homes – that was the primary driver, so the group is self-selecting … it's people who are motivated on an environmental level, it's people who are motivated to better their quality of life. (Edward, age range 46–55)

This demonstrates a combination of broader and personal motivations underpinning the desire to create sustainable homes.

Two of the interviewees within this study (Alison and Helen) were single mothers, each with a child under the age of five; both interviewees were pursuing an affordable group self-build route using sweat equity. They were also both very proactive and central figures within their

groups (see Wallace et al., 2013a), directors of their respective community organisations. Given the gender divisions within most self-builds (Pickerill, 2016), it is unusual for these women to be participating within a self-build project without a male partner, and even more so to be driving these projects. Both interviewees stated that they could not envisage any other route to home ownership (shared or otherwise), in stark contrast to the motivations of many individual self-builders, where access to housing is rarely a motivation (Benson, 2014). Alison and Helen additionally stress that they could not consider pursuing an individual self-build project, group self-building being accessible to them in terms of finance, the skills and knowledge required, and the mutual support provided. This aligns with Parvin et al.'s (2011) suggestion that group self-build lowers the capital threshold for entry, which refers not only to financial capital but also personal capital in terms of skills and knowledge. This needs to be met in turn by social capital, which within a spontaneously organised group may or may not be sufficient to deliver the scheme (Hamiduddin and Gallent, 2016). It is for this reason that groups either need to enlist assistance from outside their community or adapt the methods they intend to use. Indeed, many of the schemes of which interviewees were members had chosen to use straw bale construction, including because of the ease (and speed) of construction it allows (Seyfang, 2010).

In summary, a range of motivations for group self-building were identified by the interviewees. Many of the motivations identified related to the fundamental need for housing which could not be met through the rental sector either in terms of quality or affordability. Similarly, a need for stability was a commonly cited motivation due to the short-term nature of tenancies within the private rental market. The central themes of affordability, community and environmental sustainability aligned strongly with the literature, but the narrative underlying these themes further extends the existing knowledge. Moreover, the additional personal motivations identified contribute new information to the body of knowledge.

Conclusions

This chapter has provided a unique exploration of the motivations for group self-building from the perspective of 11 individuals who have completed or plan to complete a group self-build project in England. A genuine appetite and aspiration for sustainability in the homes of the self-builders was highlighted. Furthermore, aspirations for a different

and more community-minded way of living were exposed. Many interviewees identified a desire to work with others, to learn from and with them, to build closer relationships within either existing or new communities. Interviewees were often morally opposed to the way in which the housing market has changed and the very real impact this is having on communities and their ability to sustain themselves. Many interviewees were driven by a need for housing security and stability, which resulted in their taking a proactive approach in forging a common housing pathway through grassroots action.

The group self-builders interviewed have cast a new light on the gender divisions in self-build. The female self-builders have not only played an equal role in housing delivery, but have taken a leadership role in driving forward their housing pathways. Therefore, whilst self-building a house clearly presents challenges, this chapter has revealed that doing so within a group has the potential to empower participants whilst delivering sustainable, diverse, sociable and cohesive communities for the long term, creating something wonderful in our back yards.

Acknowledgements

11

Building a self: community self-build and the reconstruction of identity

Katherine Collins

Adam took a last drag and crushed the smouldering butt beneath his concrete-spattered boots. He was standing just out of the line of sight of the office window, leaning against the portacabin that everyone on site called the café. It was a decent setup here, cups of tea and bacon rolls. It was good not to have to always be worrying about what was in the fridge, and what to buy that wouldn't go out of date before he remembered to cook it. And to make sure to put enough aside to buy the food in the first place. And pay rent. He sighed. It had been three years since he left, and he still struggled to get all this stuff straight in his mind. So much easier when they just took it out of your money, and you went and got your food. And the money in your pocket was your money, not rent, and bills, and all that stuff. Three years out, and he was still finding it hard to remember it all. Didn't even learn it in school. He frowned. Didn't learn anything in school, did he? Apart from how not to be there half the time. He wasn't in a very good place today, and he appreciated that Justin and Len seemed to understand, and were giving him some space. He was grateful to them, he was happy to admit that. But he just couldn't deal with anyone today. Things weren't as bad as they had been, he wasn't so angry, so out of control, not since he'd been down to Tedworth House. He was looking forward to the end of the project, when he could shut the door of his flat, and be just him. Him and his missus. Stability, that's what he wanted. And control. He'd done a few of the training courses on offer, but there wasn't anything that really floated his boat. He wanted his own business, didn't want to be under the thumb of some boss-man

ordering him around, talking to him like a child. He was stubborn like that. Always had been, always would be. He straightened up and trudged back through the metal railings onto the site, pulling his work gloves from the back pocket of his jeans and putting them on.

Challenges to identity

Throughout their lives, people find themselves needing or wanting to rethink their sense of who they are, to perform 'identity work' (Lawler, 2014, 52). Changing career, becoming a parent, or retirement, all are life events that might cause someone to feel that some aspect of their identity has evolved, changed or been lost. Sometimes these changes are anticipated and desired, and sometimes they are unwanted and unexpected. Becoming homeless is one such challenge (Snow and Anderson, 1987; Boydell et al., 2000; Butchinsky, 2007); another is substance addiction (Best et al., 2016). Some changes are linked to institutions, such as being sent to prison and subsequent release (Harvey, 2013; Coffey, 2012); or joining the armed forces, and later making the jump back to 'civvy street'. In some traditions, events like these and their consequences have been framed using language like 'biographical disruption' (Bury, 1982) or identity 'turning points' (Karp, 1996). From other perspectives, particularly those that contest the idea of an essential 'self' that drives the performance of identity, coping with the effects of these events may be seen more as a continued process of self-policing, to force a fit with social norms (Foucault, 1979; Rose, 1999).

Identity, then, is a slippery term, with a meaning that is at the same time simple and obvious – an identity is who someone is – and theoretically multifaceted and complex: it is 'not fixed, but ... not nothing either' (Hall, 1997, 33). Different traditions would variously define an identity as something we develop as we go through adolescence (e.g. Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980); as something we navigate in reference to social groups (Tajfel, 1982); as something we work on through reflexive choices as a sort of life project, deciding 'What to do? How to act? Who to be?' (Giddens, 1991, 70); as something we perform (Goffman, 1956) as a fluid, evolving process (Butler, 1990). In this chapter, I have drawn upon the definition proposed by Steph Lawler, who calls in turn upon Ricoeur's narrative interpretation (1991) to conceptualise identity as 'something produced through the narratives people use to explain and understand their lives' (Lawler, 2014, 30). And the reason we tend to view an identity

as a single thread that weaves through a life is not because there is some sort of essential 'self' residing beneath the surface, but because we are continually telling and retelling these narratives, producing the self as something stable that continues through time.

> David lowered his newspaper, and looked around warily. He had moved his table slightly to one side so it didn't block his way if he needed to move quickly, and from his vantage point in the corner he could see right along the bar to the front door. He ran down his mental inventory of the people in the room: Jon was behind the bar, looking relaxed after the lunchtime rush. The elderly man, who kept shuffling out for a fag, was still sat in the other corner nursing his pint. And those two. He didn't recognise them, and they made him uncomfortable. Why were they sitting wearing long coats in this weather? It didn't make sense. Unless the coats were hiding something. Time to go, just to be sure. David folded his paper, finished the rest of his half in two gulps, proud of his self-control, and stood up to leave the pub. He pushed open the door and paused in the doorway to scan the street. He waited for a couple of people to pass – he couldn't cope with anyone walking behind him, it made him too anxious – and set off for home.

> The hostel wasn't much, but it was better than sleeping under a bridge. And when he'd been to see the council about housing after he was released, all they'd done was ask him if he used drugs, if he was pregnant – he shook his head in disbelief at the memory – or if he'd recently entered the country.
>
> 'I've served my country,' he'd said, 'doesn't that make a difference?'
>
> 'I'm sorry,' the advisor had said. 'You aren't a priority.'
>
> His probation officer hadn't been able to help either, so he'd tried the British Legion. He didn't want handouts, he wanted his life back, he'd told the advisor.

Homelessness and ex-Services personnel

Most transitions out of the armed forces are successful, but a minority of people have difficulty adjusting to civilian life (Forces in Mind Trust, 2013). Estimates for the proportion of ex-military who experience

homelessness have varied considerably, in part because of differences between research methods, sites and what definition of homelessness is being used (Dandeker et al., 2005). In 2015 in London, the charity St Mungo's counted 452 rough sleepers who had served in the armed forces, of whom 142 were UK nationals. This equates to around 3 per cent from the UK, and 6 per cent including other nationalities (CHAIN, 2016). These figures have remained consistent since 2012 (CHAIN, 2016, 27), but would not cover those deemed homeless under a broader definition: living in hostels, 'sofa-surfing' or living temporarily in a hostel or bed and breakfast hotel (Johnson et al., 2008).

From a different perspective, a study conducted by the National Audit Office (NAO) in 2007 concluded that of those who had left the forces in the previous two years, 5 per cent had 'been homeless' (2007, 33). But in the same study the NAO reported that 15 per cent of Service leavers, when asked about current living arrangements, were *not* living in their own home, with relatives, renting privately or living in social housing, which would indicate that they have in fact been homeless in the broader sense. The same study found that 5 per cent of Service leavers had experienced problems with alcohol, 2 per cent received psychiatric treatment as an outpatient, and 1.4 per cent had problems with drugs (it seems very likely that the same person may experience more than one of these issues, but the report provides counts by issue only). Evidence available in the UK suggests that homeless people with an ex-Services background are likely to be older (Riverside ECHG, 2011; Tessler et al., 2002) and to struggle more with alcohol and physical disability than with drugs and mental health problems (Knight et al., 2011; Dandeker et al., 2005). While it has received some attention in the media, prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has been found to be relatively low: 4–6 per cent among personnel returning from Iraq (Sundin et al., 2011). Delayed-onset PTSD, which may be associated with other life stresses (Andrews et al., 2009) – becoming homeless would be one such, we can assume – was found to have a prevalence of 3.5 per cent (Goodwin et al., 2011).

These findings are consistent with the research into the issues facing homeless people generally, a group that has diverse and complex needs (Sumerall et al., 2000). People who are homeless are likely to need support with mental health, physical illness and substance addiction. They are also likely to have experienced family problems and abuse; been long-term unemployed; not completed their education; had a history of offending; or many years of institutional living (Pleace and Quilgars, 2003). Homeless ex-Services personnel generally follow the same routes

into homelessness as the general homeless population, with sources of risk being broadly the same between these groups (Montgomery et al., 2013). Routes to homelessness include vulnerabilities and difficulties prior to enlisting, like spending time in care, having difficulty settling down in their younger lives, or being in trouble with the law prior to enlisting (Lemos, 2005; Mares and Rosenheck, 2004). Significant life events, such as bereavement, financial crisis (see also Johnson et al., 2008) or family breakdown (Doyle and Peterson, 2011; MacManus and Wessely, 2011) may also be a trigger.

'I want to work,' David said to the British Legion advisor. 'And I have to get away from that halfway place. I know I've made some mistakes. I'm not blaming anyone but myself. It was a struggle for all of us, coping with my problems "up here"' he tapped the right side of his head. 'She couldn't cope with it; I wasn't the same person. We're always away, always away, you know? And then you come back and then you live together 24 hours a day, you fall off the wagon, they can't deal with it. Five guys I knew when I come out, and within a year of them being out, all their women left them. I still saw the kids, mind, it broke my heart each time I had to leave 'em.'

The British Legion advisor nodded sympathetically, and handed David £70 of shopping vouchers to help tide him over.

'There is something else you might be interested in,' she said. 'We've got this self-build project going on, up by the river, would you like …'

'What's it about?' interrupted David, cautiously.

'You give a minimum of two, two-and-a-half days a week to the project, and at the end you get a flat to live in. A brand new flat,' she said. 'And you'll be given help while you're doing it, training courses, help with your CV. What do you think?' David had thought that sounded great. If there wasn't a catch. So he'd taken the piece of paper with the mobile number of someone called Mark, and given him a call.

'Come down the site tomorra,' Mark had said, after they'd chatted for a few minutes. 'We'll have some details off ya, and see how things go from there. Alright?'

Supported community self-build

The next morning, David trudged up the main road from the footbridge, past a row of terraced houses with brightly painted front

doors. A noise made him jump and look around for the source, but it was just a young bloke slipping out of his door for a smoke. Discreetly, David looked him up and down, but he didn't see a threat there. The only thing out of the ordinary was that the young smoker was wearing socks, and the pavement was wet. David shrugged, and turned left into a side street. Left again, into a narrower street, a brick wall on one side. He could be over it, if he had to. Very faintly, he could smell bacon frying.

Four months later, David was on site most days. They gave him a cooked breakfast every day, as long as he turned up on time. That was worth the 40-minute bus ride, standing room only. But he was out of the hostel, they were going to let him move into one of the flats from their first project, and they'd arranged for him to see a counsellor about his anxiety. He'd done the basic training offered, site safety, industrial ropes – that had made him nervous, but the other lads had been encouraging – and he had various plant licences, like forklift and forward-tipping dumper, coming up. It was good; he liked the work, though he mostly kept himself to himself on site. Some of the 'squaddies' annoyed him.

In 2011, the government's housing strategy changed the terminology around self-build. Self-build became 'custom build' (DCLG, 2011) and a typology of seven different types of custom build was identified. This project fitted the description of a 'supported community self-build group' (Wallace et al., 2013, 7). With this model, a social landlord or independent self-build organisation helps individuals learn the skills to build a group of homes together as opposed to custom builds led by developers, or projects initiated, organised and managed by individuals. In this project, the build was initiated and organised by a social housing association in partnership with a charitable organisation; the latter recruited a group of 10 individuals known as 'self-builders', who worked on site, undertook training and moved into the properties as tenants of the housing association.

The narratives and analysis presented here are based on interview data from a study to investigate the personal, social and economic impact of supported community self-build scheme for ex-Services personnel in housing need. The project had a number of distinct phases: preparation, recruitment, build and post-build. The preparation phase included organising funding for the project; forming a coalition of partners; finding and purchasing suitable land; obtaining planning permission; appointing a contractor; and all the other administrative tasks required to get a social

housing project off the ground. In 2013, a site suitable for a development of 10 units was identified, and work scheduled to begin in early 2014. In the autumn of 2013 there were some issues with planning. The time it took to get the various issues resolved and revised plans submitted and approved was much longer than anticipated and as a result the start date had to be put back to January 2015.

Recruitment happened alongside this: publicising the project in various ways, visits to ex-Services support organisations and hostels, meetings, phone calls, conversations. The criteria were that participants must be ex-Service; homeless or in temporary accommodation; and unemployed, underemployed or in insecure employment. They must also be free of drug and alcohol abuse and willing to commit to working on site for the duration of the build process. In April 2014, once a stable group was recruited – though this proved an unpredictable and changeable process – a residential team-building activity took place. Due to various factors, including the delay in starting the project, several of the original recruits drifted away and had to be replaced in the autumn of 2014. A contractor was appointed, and the ground was broken in January 2015.

Working with people living chaotically

The contractor was responsible for the group of 10 self-builders day-to-day, keeping records of attendance, running the café and distributing food parcels donated by a local charity. The self-builders worked with the on-site trainer to develop a personalised learning plan and were supported (and funded) to undertake training, which ranged from basic courses that were low cost, sometimes free, to more expensive courses in heavy plant machinery likely to result in greater employability. During the project, three self-builders left or were asked to leave the project, and their places were taken up by others. One violated the terms of his probation and was returned to prison; another was unable to overcome a substance addition; and the third got into debt and disappeared.

Jimmy propped his rucksack against the low wall then sat on the cold ground, leaning back against his bag. He rested one elbow against his knee and cupped his fag with the other hand to shield it from the wind. His hand shook. He felt bad, but what was he supposed to do? He'd got into some bother, and he'd taken out a loan to give him some time to sort it out. Enjoying being flush for a change,

he'd had a bit of fun over the bank holiday (who wouldn't?) and ended up in a bad way. He'd borrowed a bit off Charlie, just for a few days, to keep things going, he'd said. But now, some serious people were on his case, and there was no way he could pay them what he'd agreed, and Charlie. He felt bad about that. When things were more sorted, maybe he'd come back. He didn't like to think of leaving Charlie short. It was the drink, always the drink that started it. Some of the lads on the project had talked about the drinking culture in the army, but he didn't really blame that. Some people come out of it alright and some people just go downhill, if they've got tendencies. And he supposed he had tendencies.

He hadn't really wanted to leave the army, but he'd hurt his back in a training accident. When he came out, he moved up north looking for work, and found a decent sales job at a bathroom company. Managed to save a bit, and decided to have some fun. Went travelling, met someone, got into the free party circuit, and dabbled in some harder stuff. When that relationship broke down, he'd come back to the UK and started his own business fitting bathrooms. There were periods of sobriety where he lived a normal life, three months, six months. And then it'd be a nightmare for six months, before he pulled himself back from the brink. But Jimmy had never thought of himself as your classic alcoholic who needs to drink every day, maybe that's why it took him so long to try and make some changes. He could go months without a drink. Well, weeks, maybe. And left alone in a room, he could probably drink without any problem. But when he drank with certain people, there were consequences; one drink would turn into a three-day binge, and … problems. He'd lost his licence, smashed his car up. Eventually, he'd lost his flat and had to move into a room in a shared house. Lots of partying, lots of drugs. He'd got into some bother, there'd been some violence, some involvement with the police, and they'd thrown him out. He'd ended up on the streets, using, and then in a hostel for veterans. That's where he'd heard about the self-build project. He'd had been suspicious at first. He'd said, 'No, I'm not a builder.' But one of the lads on the project had said, 'You don't really have to be, you just have to be willing.' So Jimmy had thought, why not? It was a chance. He'd started to get some help for his addictions. Proper help, not just promises to himself. He started doing the programme, for the first time in his life doing something, actions rather than just saying, 'I want to stop'. But he couldn't seem to stop, and they couldn't have someone on site that was still using heroin.

Len had offered to arrange treatment for him, send him to some farm somewhere in the middle of nowhere. He didn't like the sound of that. Mark had taken him to a caff, bought him lunch, and told him about the project that was getting going in Plymouth. Mark had said it'd help to be away from all the bad influences. Maybe it would. Maybe. He had Mark's number. The coach doors slid out and open with a hiss, Jimmy pushed himself to his feet and slung his rucksack over his shoulder. He climbed the narrow steps, found a seat, stowed his stuff on the rack, and settled in as the coach pulled out of the bus station and headed towards the motorway.

The self-builders tracked to the end of the project ranged in age from early thirties to early fifties. Their experiences were largely consistent with those described in the research literature: many had become homeless through relationship breakdown, and were experiencing (or had experienced) mental health difficulties, including PTSD and addiction to alcohol or drugs. One was a rough sleeper, one alternated between sleeping in his car and sofa-surfing. The others were sofa-surfing or living in temporary hostels. Six had some form of employment, one of whom had a permanent job; the remainder were claiming Jobseeker's Allowance. Two self-builders had problems with their physical health, experiencing pain. Neither was registered disabled when the project began. Construction was completed in late 2015 and the building opened officially in December. The self-builders were assisted in moving and settling into their new accommodation, each received a grant of £1,000 for furniture and household items. They became tenants of the housing association, able to access support from the association's community team.

Ryan looked up from the schematics he was checking, and sipped his tea. He was a few weeks into his level 3 diploma in electrotechnical services. He hadn't thought he'd be able to do that course, because it was so expensive. But he'd sat down with Justin, the training manager, and they'd sorted funding. It had taken a while to get the budget approved, and he'd had to chase for it. But it had come through eventually. And as it happened, the sparks needed a bit of extra help, so he was shadowing the senior electrician on site, helping with paperwork and other basic stuff. He loved it. He loved every day. Working in construction, the lads, the banter on the site, it was familiar and comfortable. He'd enjoyed his time in the army. Loved the adventure, the travelling and the excitement of that life. It had been his routine, his life, his wife, his family. Everything. All he'd had to do was keep

his mouth shut and do his job. But it had all been taken away in that one moment. They'd all known what they'd signed up for. Give them an enemy, they'd fight, hands down, tooth and nail. But he'd come along, straight on his forward section and three of his mates, including his best mate … no. He remembered what they'd said, getting caught in a friendly fire. That's everything OK is it, a friendly fire? Ryan closed his eyes and took a deep breath in, held it for a few seconds, then let it out slowly. He didn't need to go there.

When he'd come out, it was a big shock to his system. He couldn't handle it. He'd been in hostels, trying to get jobs. He'd found it hard to cope with noise, people, crowded places – he was a broken man. There'd been some trouble, drinking, a crisis, police involvement. He'd been in custody when someone from the British Legion had turned up and they'd put him in touch with the project. Len had understood what he'd been through and got him into the health system, got him into counselling, helped him find somewhere secure to live. He owed him a lot. Ryan took another gulp of his tea and turned his mind back to the schematics.

Military and post-military identities: the literature

There is a considerable body of research into military identities. In what has been called the 'classical' tradition of military sociology (Woodward and Jenkings, 2011, 254), researchers have been most concerned with how best to manage identities in pursuit of military objectives. On the other hand, interpretative approaches pay more attention to individual subjectivities, with a particular focus on gendered identities and military masculinities (for example Atherton, 2009; Higate and Henry, 2009; Woodward, 1998). In more recent research, it has been suggested that military identities can usefully be conceptualised not only as attributes that can be mapped into sociological or military categories, but as practices emerging from within the narrated lived experiences (as per Lawler, 2014) of Services personnel. Woodward and Jenkings (2011) found identities constructed around skill, competence and expertise; kinship and camaraderie; and relations to the operations or sphere of Service (e.g. Iraq, Northern Ireland) in soldiers' narratives. The narratives of the self-builders chimed with their findings (including the observation that personal meaning can be inscribed in absence as much as in presence: such absences were also in the self-builders' narratives – such as one of the self-builders who went into Ryan's narrative shying away from talking about

the loss of his friends). But the self-builders were no longer soldiers, they no longer felt that their skills and professional competencies were needed, or recognised as such (another self-builder's ability to 'do his job' in the army – and this was a euphemistic absence in his narrative, we both knew to what he was referring – involved skills not required in civilian life). Loss of comradeship was painful, as was the feeling that 'civvies' neither fully understood nor particularly appreciated the service given and sacrifices made (as with David's housing advisor at the council).

As well as military identities during Service, the consequences for identity of the transition from military to civilian life have been the focus of some attention. Herman and Yarwood (2014) studied what they regarded as successful transitions, and found that while some respondents had come to terms with their new identities, others were 'stuck in a liminal space' (2014, 53) which led to feelings of isolation. It has been suggested that the relatively high rates of homelessness among Service leavers might be related to this sense of being neither one thing nor the other: too institutionalised (this was a word used by several self-builders, including several of those whose experiences went into the Adam and David stories), or too damaged by their experiences to truly fit in with civilian life but no longer having a place in the military either. So they may seek a transitory lifestyle similar to the one they had in the forces (Cloke et al., 2002); rough sleeping, for example, has been linked to knowledge of outdoor survival techniques and physical fitness (Higate, 2000). A high proportion of ex-Services personnel have also been found to stay in the area near to the military base at which they served (Riverside ECHG, 2011). Taken together, this body of literature suggests that identities constructed through the experience of military service can be hard to give up, particularly when a person doesn't have a stable place to live, where they can maintain the aspects of their identity that seem important to them: their sense of themselves as independent, capable, masculine men with skills that are useful; and they are used to thinking of those skills as useful, indeed vital, for the security of their country.

Community self-build and the reconstruction of a post-military, post-homeless identity

'Where do you want it?' Adam grabbed the heavy plant pot with both hands and lifted it off the ground. He'd been walking across the car park when he'd spotted Charlie struggling to drag it across the ground.

'Should've moved it to the right place before I put the compost in and watered it!' said Charlie. 'Thanks.'

'No problem, no problem at all mate,' said Adam. He perched on the low wall of the communal garden that Charlie had made.

'So, how's it going?' asked Charlie. 'How's work?'

'Yeah, you know. Boss is alright, I'm just keeping my head down, d'ya know what I mean? But it pays the bills. Well, most of 'em…'

Adam's drinking was under control now, he was in a much better place all round. But he was still struggling with his money. He'd called Justin last week, to see if he could lend him 50 quid, but Justin couldn't do it, because the project had finished. So things were still a bit chaotic, a bit hand-to-mouth. His job was casual, labouring on another site with one of the contractors from the build, so he didn't always know how much he'd have in his pocket at the end of the week. But the Housing Association were good land-lords, Laura had always been there if he needed advice or help, and he knew that as long as he did his best and kept them in the loop, he'd hang on to the flat. He didn't want to lose it; it was his stability. And once he got going with his own business, being his own boss, everything would balance out.

'Coats on! It's cold out there,' called David, standing by the solid front door with its smart row of buzzers. It was almost a year since David had walked anxiously up the little access road, survey-ing the terrain and planning out escape routes in his head. Now, he was taking the girls over to the park for a blast on their scooters, get a bit of fresh air. He'd found a job working shifts. It was OK, best thing was it fitted around his time with the kids. It was a bit of a struggle financially; David thought the flat was pretty expensive for where it was. But they were all happy there; it felt like home. It sounded like home, too, he thought ruefully, as the girls shrieked and whooped as they ran down the stairs. He wanted to stay there, put down some roots. He waved to Adam and Charlie as he passed them, still chatting in the little garden Charlie looked after.

Ryan's key made a satisfyingly solid sound as he unlocked his front door. It had been a busy day on site, and he just wanted to chill in his own space. He shut the door, cutting off the sound of David's girls playing in the stairwell. He'd hoped to stay with the electrical contractors who'd worked on the project, but it hadn't worked out. Not because they hadn't wanted him, something to do with not getting a contract or something. So he'd looked for other

work and found a position with a small firm. He was getting on well with his boss, he reckoned he might like to keep up his training, maybe do a day release studying something like building services engineering. Now he had a solid base and decent salary. He'd be out collecting for the British Legion on Poppy Day. And he'd started working with the Legion, giving talks in schools about their work. There had been tough times and good times, but he was looking forward to the future.

The study found that many self-builders had been able to remake relationships, particularly with their children. And that working together for many months on site had given them back a sense of comradeship. Not the same as what several called the 'brotherhood' that they had felt in the military, but nevertheless they liked having a shared sense of belonging because of their common past, and because they had worked together on the self-build. And the stability offered by the project – the prospect of secure housing and the training available – helped them find employment, an important way for them to feel as though they were self-sufficient, and not 'scroungers' (a term used by one of the self-builders drawn on for Adam) reliant on handouts. Several found employment in the building trade, discovering that the masculine, tough and practical nature of construction work and the 'banter' on site suited their sense of who they were. Being part of the self-build project did seem to effect some improvements to the self-builders' emotional well-being generally. For those with serious difficulties it represented the first steps towards seeking support and gaining a more solid base from which to recover from trauma or addiction, rather than full recovery. And they spoke of feeling pride and a sense of achievement, increased confidence and willingness to trust. Other emotional responses included feelings of contentment and having put down stable roots at last. Self-builders who completed the project seemed to rebuild – quite literally – their identities as part of the process.

> … it gave [me] my life back. If I didn't go on this project I'd probably still be where I was at, in hostels … in the woods … and I still think I'd be doing that or jail or in a nut house… (Self-builder)

Summary of research methods

Three rounds of recruitment to the project were monitored, and participant observation of recruitment meetings and the two-day team building

session was conducted. Interviews were conducted in March, and for replacement self-builders in May 2015. Interviews with the project team and with three self-builders from an earlier project and site visits took place between January 2015 and July 2016. Final interviews with self-builders took place by telephone in July 2016, seven months after they had moved into their new properties. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Not every self-builder agreed to be interviewed at every stage of the research, for a variety of different reasons, but every self-builder was interviewed at least once and observed at some point during the process. The university's ethics committee approved the research.

Arts-based research (ABR) is a methodology that deploys artistic and literary practices as part of the research process (Knowles and Cole, 2008; Leavy, 2013, 2015; Barone and Eisner, 2012). Four semi-fictionalised narratives were plotted as part of the study to highlight how complex and varied were the experiences. To create them, first, during the open coding phase of the analysis, all the data relating to an individual's life history, their training and experiences on the project, and their status at completion was coded as a 'narrative event'. Next, for each case, a life map was visualised, with each narrative event in sequence. There were 14 life maps in total. For each, a general typology of narrative events was developed. Some examples are: 'homeless as a result of relationship breakdown'; 'criminal conviction'; 'substance addiction'; 'regular presence on site'; 'worked towards personal goals'. Once the general typology had been matched to each map, personal information was removed, leaving only an anonymised sequence of events. With these diagrams, four typical stories were identified and, with these as the basic narrative structure, creative reinterpretations based on a combination of the life histories captured in interviews (with identifying details changed, including their names) and the researchers' own experiences, recorded in fieldnotes, of the places and people involved (for example, walking to the building site and noticing the young man standing outside his door smoking, wearing only socks) were written.

Acknowledgements

Part 4
Perspectives from practice

12

Self-build neighbourhoods for living and working: a view from Tübingen, Germany

Andreas Feldtkeller

In Germany, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collateral damage resulting jointly from modern urban development and globalisation has come to a head. Urban traffic continues to destroy the fabric of the inner-city environment as well as the surrounding urban areas. Ongoing reconstruction in the metropolitan conurbations makes it difficult to find integrated or holistic solutions because issues of economic development and daily life are dealt with separately, and because 'the city' and 'the region' are considered as separate domains. It has become obvious that we need to apply models of 'late-urbanisation' to the structure of our neighbourhoods. This would include bringing aspects of living and working closer together, in this way shortening distances, improving social cohesion and encouraging the use of public transportation. However, creative competition around the best ideas for this concept is limited. The real estate industry is fixated on the separate concepts of life + leisure and work + transport. The spread of digitisation in all areas of everyday life distracts from our ability to critically examine the neighbourhood as the main unit for solving these urgent problems.

This chapter forms an extended case study of a new self-build urban quarter in the small university city of Tübingen, where living and working were integrated, creating a model of design and resident-led development that departed radically from the contemporary norms of developer-led housing. The site of this new 'living laboratory' was to be a former military barracks area on the southern edge of the city, which the French army garrison had vacated following the reunification of Germany in 1991. However, during the initial phase of planning, it became clear that local real estate developers were not interested in

co-operating to realise this unusual development model. Yet it was evident that the scheme had strong community support, and households were ready to adopt the mixed-use concept, provided that the city, as the future owner of the existing barracks, would be willing to sell building plots for them to develop through self-building in groups or *Baugruppen* (see also Hamiduddin, this volume).

The conversion of the barracks site into a model for integrated living and working was, in practice, the result of an accidental encounter between two movements that would otherwise seem unlikely: a desire by city planners to create genuine mixed-use quarters, and the appetite and energy of citizens to construct them. In view of the current and widespread trend towards a 'return to the city', a link between urban life and work needs to be established to reduce traffic and increase socialisation. The business community does not (and cannot) support the creation of a lively neighbourhood, so city dwellers who are willing to take the matter into their own hands will have to create it for themselves. This 'encounter' led, in the early 1990s, to results which no one initially thought possible but which in practice were successfully implemented.

Although few serious attempts to repeat this experiment were made, one thing became clear: if we do not start to focus more on the importance of the neighbourhood for integration, social cohesion and everyday life, we will have difficulty tackling the upcoming challenges for our cities and regions. It has become normal for us that the business industry decides where work is required. Clearly, there is a big difference between whether work is required within the neighbourhood or only off-site in the industrial area, the office park or in a technology centre.

The challenge of (re)integrating living and working

Separation

Across Europe, urban and regional planning authorities focused on the relationship between living and working in the reconstruction of war-damaged cities. To avoid interference as much as possible and to create a 'healthy' living and working environment, strict separation of residential and industrial areas was maintained. Based on the famous Athens Charter, and also on the philosophy of the Bauhaus (Ludwig Hilberseimer), architects Johannes Göderitz, Roland Rainer and Hubert Hoffmann published their book *Die gegliederte und aufgelockerte Stadt* (The Articulated and Relaxed City) in 1957. Shortly after, the West German state adopted the

Land Utilisation Ordinance (*Baunutzungsverordnung* – BauNVO). This, in the context of a strong city growth, led to decades of ongoing structural loosening and socio-spatial separation. It soon became clear that this process caused the loss of the main characteristics of the city. However, no systematic review of the mechanisms that were set in motion took place. The separation not only marked the outward sprawl of cities into their surroundings, but also the transformation of urban neighbourhoods. A good example of these changes is Berlin's Kreuzberg district. A selection of 14 blocks in the district were documented in 1886, consisting of 519 factories covering 75 different industries. In 1910, the number had risen to 829 companies. Twenty years after the new planning law was introduced in 1961, only 117 companies covering 30 industries were left, and today not even one of those companies exists (the shops on the ground floors of the front houses are not counted in the documentation provided).

Businesses have not only emigrated; many simply ceased to exist when they were absorbed by industrialisation and later technological change, despite the aim of the 'social market economy' not to discriminate against the smaller or neighbourhood-embedded companies. Indeed, Hausmann and Soltendiek (1986: 87) note that:

> The mix of functions, such as residence and production and distribution of goods in a manageable area (block, street) ensured an urban character, which is referred to as the concept of urbanicity. It is associated with nuisance through noise and emissions, but also contains a high level of diversity of experience and quality of living, especially for people who are not yet or no longer involved in the development process.

The dangers for social cohesion that have been linked to such urban changes have been described in detail by Jane Jacobs in her 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. A German translation of this book was published in Germany in 1963. But the conservative city governments with their non-profit housing associations were supported by urban sociology in their view that the social question primarily concerned the housing shortage and that increasing state-subsidised social housing was the solution. Over the following decades, the construction of large residential settlements played a decisive role, which left little room for private self-initiatives.

Although in some older city centres attempts were made to maintain a remaining spatial combination of life and work, the cities with their

agglomerations kept developing into 'Fordist cities', fuelled by technological advances in transport and communications. As in Berlin, 90 per cent of the population of Germany's larger cities may be assumed to live in an environment that is largely functionally separated.

Since the 1990s, the environmental (land use, climate change, species loss) and social (separation, loss of balancing work and family life, the loss of incidental social contact and polarisation) effects can no longer be considered to have been solely generated by society. The link between these patterns and the spatial loosening and separation that are now considered normal in urban planning must be addressed as core matters of sustainability. Stefan Siedentop (2003) identified the following symptoms resulting from the growth of agglomerations: increasing resource intensity, increasing traffic congestion, continuing socio-spatial separation processes, increasing infrastructure intensity and increasingly fragmented open space structures.

Although 'smart growth' and 'compact city' planning strategies (Daniels, 2001; Dieleman and Wegener, 2004) have been developed to address these issues, a question remains whether such compression is, in itself, sufficient for creating diverse and vibrant new neighbourhoods. An alternative approach is to address separation directly through a 'late-urbanisation' approach extending beyond the inner cities to the suburbs, outskirts and margins of cities. This was the approach pursued on Tübingen's fragmented southern fringe.

The French Quarter

The French Quarter in Tübingen, briefly mentioned in the introduction, may be one of the earliest projects attempting to create a small-scale and diverse functional mix in a new urban quarter, a counterbalance to the trend towards separation of living and working. Essential to this story was the fact that Tübingen had its own urban renewal office, a remnant of the era of urban renewal in the 1970s. This office had long-term experience of urban renewal and competence in urban development law. It also had experience of those affected by urban measures and of planning in co-operation with the Department of Social and Cultural Affairs. Early on, it became apparent that the unusual aim and objectives of this project had to be well founded and had to have broad political applicability. In the event, initial targets for housing and employment were accepted by the public and the municipal council without debate. The planning objectives were defined in local legislation as follows:

Planning objectives: creating mixed-use neighbourhoods with a wide range of living arrangements, work and public facilities; complementing the large-scale barracks structure with smaller townhouse developments as a prerequisite for the intended variety of uses; designing new public road spaces that can be used for the adjoining dense development as an area of everyday life; producing an attractive mix of old and new between existing permanent barracks architecture (to show its historical origin also in the future) and added city architecture. (*Gemeinderatsprotokoll* 4.3.1991)

From the outset, the French Quarter neighbourhood concept featured functional diversity and the 'city of short distances' concept, involving a combination of new small (partially incomplete) block developments, a number of old buildings from the existing barracks in need of major improvement, and various public spaces, with a focus not so much on motorised traffic but on providing quality space for pedestrians. This 'hybrid' structure is a prerequisite for accommodating a diverse mix of homes, small to medium-sized enterprises in the services and production sectors, and social and cultural institutions. Self-build or *Baugruppen* was a critical mode of development for the new buildings of the French

Figure 12.1 Model of the project in its environment

Figure 12.2   View over the rooftops of the French Quarter

Quarter. The first *Baugruppen* started construction of their buildings in 1993, using freelance architects to design and supervise construction of the buildings. In Tübingen the use of this small-scale approach to building design and construction was something of a revolution within the development industry.

Brief project description (Master Plan 1993)

Total area = 64.50 hectares / neighbourhood area = 43.66 hectares, of which French Quarter = 13.27 hectares / expected inhabitants = 6,110, of whom expected for French Quarter = 2,390 / planned jobs = 2,490, of which planned for French Quarter = 500 (realised 700).

A new approach

During the 1990s, various publications and announcements calling for small-scale mixed-function developments and for a 'city of short distances' appeared in the political and academic arenas. Of particular note is the final report from 1993 of the commission *Zukunft Stadt 2000* set up by the Federal Ministry of Regional Planning, Building and Urban Development with the following core statements:

> A focus on internal development and extension as well as adding to existing neighbourhoods will hardly do justice to foreseeable needs. There is a need for regional development concepts and more regionally oriented planning decisions. Here, ecological and economic considerations suggest 'cities of short distances' and diverse mixing in polycentric areas. This requires new concepts of control. It is not enough to merely formulate images and design models of a future city. Changes applied to a built city must go hand-in-hand with changes in the production structure, the traffic conditions and everyday life. … Cities are characterized by dense transport networks, intensive spatial division of labour, and exchange of goods. They need efficient mobility systems. However, subsidising mobility in any form is contrary to the aims of a compact, mixed city of short distances. The excessive spatial division of labour and the extensive mobility that characterize urban regions can, for the most part, be attributed to the lack of allocation of mobility costs. … Cities of functional separation and thus high dominance of car traffic are now mostly cities for regular users or cities for users with average or normal needs. Irregular users, especially children, the young, the elderly, single women with children, users with atypical lifestyles and people belonging to minorities encounter various obstacles, risks or even threats. We are a long way from having cities conveniently usable without threats for vulnerable minorities. … High density and mixed usage can help to provide or strengthen safety and control, contact and stimulation. … An ecological urban development is successful only if the 'polluter pays principle' is taken seriously.

The content of this report alone did not lead to the creation of fair policies. But neither can the issues raised be ignored. Indeed, different stakeholders began to voice their support for the principles outlined above, notably in the 1996 national report on the international conference Habitat II

and in the German government's subsequent report on the 'Protection of Man and the Environment – Evaluation Criteria and Prospects for an Environmentally Acceptable Development'. This included specific guidance by the German Association of Cities to prioritise the reuse of urban brownfield land to 'avoid social separation' and to 'reduce traffic problems'. The urban sociologist Hartmut Häußermann (1998) illustrates this relationship between the urban structure and social outcomes at the neighbourhood level:

> Where profit can be made by the revaluation of property, there will be a social redeployment that results in social separation. Thus, the great good of a relatively less separated city structure is lost. … The complex, functionally and socially diverse, interdependent urban areas, which may differ in their building age, are the ideal terrain for immigrants and those with low incomes to avoid complete dependence on transfer payments. Much empirical evidence exists here. In the socially homogenous, mono-functional residential areas on the outskirts, without redundant spaces or areas that could be used for unplanned activities, the percentage of unemployment and welfare recipients among Germans and non-Germans of the same social status is five times as high as in the inner-city historical building areas.

What this makes clear is that existing urban areas that contain a mix of old and new buildings, providing a variety of tenures and affordability for different income groups, are gravely under threat.

Construction site implementation

Effective strategies for creating urban diversity have been implemented only in a very limited fashion so far. This is due to several factors:

1. There are too few attractive examples that create demand to convince developers to engage with a potentially lucrative market.
2. Neighbourhood effects (examples include reconciling work and family, integration of immigrants) correspond to the social effects of mixed-use neighbourhoods, which are generally neglected and underestimated, and insufficiently discussed in social sciences and the media.
3. The increasing trend of returning to the city, and the associated increase in urban housing shortage, makes housing so lucrative in

the inner-city development context (keyword: 'concrete gold') that decision-makers avoid investing time in planning diverse mixed neighbourhoods.

4. A mixture of residential, retail, leisure and entertainment is – if possible in conjunction with a 'social mix' – a concept that can easily be offered as a solution to these problems, also because it reacts well to the needs of the consumer and leisure society.

5. There has been very little critique of current policies within the realm of public policy.

Officially, hundreds of so-called mixed-use schemes have been developed in the last few years, yet very few of them meet the framework set out in the *Zukunft Stadt 2000* report, and the criteria subsequently laid out by Häußermann are met in only a few cases. The conclusion therefore is that if the federal and regional governments provide no strategies for the development of neighbourhoods and transport that meet the requirements for genuine environmental and social sustainability through integration, urban development will remain locked in limbo between attempted 'late-urbanisation' and continuing functional and social separation.

Living and working: Tübingen's French Quarter

A mixed-use concept

The mixed-use aim of the French Quarter project was clearly defined at the outset: 'In all conversion areas life and work should be mixed. (Commercial) Industrial and professional uses are expressly supported, insofar as they "do not significantly disturb the residents"' (BauNVO, § 6). Since the city owns the conversion area, it can enforce the mixed-use target in the resale of land and buildings if there is demand from suitable candidates. Indeed, it wasn't entirely clear at the outset what types of company would be suitable for the mixed-use zone or would opt to be located there in preference to an industrial site (see Läpple and Walter, 2000). It also became apparent at the outset that many of the old barrack block buildings would to be reused to encourage both a diverse economy and building diversity. Some buildings were in rather a dilapidated condition, meaning that their restoration had to be factored into development plans, causing interference with the planning regularity of the initial overall designs. These older buildings were quickly taken up by artisans and small-scale producers, as the buildings

proved particularly suitable for the diverse needs of the manufacturing sector. Indeed, an important lesson here is that uniformity of planning tends to encourage uniform land use and less attractive public spaces. In the new-build *Baugruppen* residential schemes, block-style perimeter developments with green courtyards were found to be an ideal model for connecting the public realm of streets and squares with the private domain of the home environment. Overall, the variety of land use across the neighbourhood, together with the structural compactness of the built forms, encourage high use of public space and pedestrian movement as well as lower automobile use. These parameters are consistent with Hans-Henning von Winning's (2016) recently developed criteria for late-urbanisation:

> [The late-urban neighbourhood] embodies personal experience, accessibility, children space, integration and identity, and the proximity to footpaths – not forgetting the distance from public transport. Urbanity can best be described using three criteria, all are individually imperative for diversity, freedom of choice, accessibility and efficient transport – i.e. mobility in the strict sense:
>
> • For pedestrians and cyclists, urban density means that many destinations are close by. For users of public transport, density around all stops means many destinations in the whole network, a prerequisite for a qualified public transport network.
> • Functional and social mix means variety, diversity and integration. It prevents the formation of rich/poor ghettos and parallel societies. It incorporates non-residential uses. And, in particular, it ensures the utilisation of all (traffic!) infrastructures during the day, week and year.
> • Public vs. private means a narrow web of streets and squares open on all sides; incorporated into the urban scheme for all modes of transport; with traffic moderated in main and side streets; designed and lively and with an urban, street-oriented design. This is also necessary for local mobility and public transport accessibility.

Developing a diverse urban environment

Although it is difficult to define an 'optimal' mix of land use for a new urban quarter, it should be noted that lively public spaces and street life require as diverse a mixture as possible, with an intimate relationship between

buildings and streets and public spaces (see Jacobs, 1961). Diversity is itself a product of allowing flexibility and openness that in turn encourages the engagement and participation of residents. Planning alone does not and cannot lead to diversity; rather, it requires the involvement of prospective customers, investors, architects, consultants and so forth. In the development of the French Quarter, collaborative self-build through *Baugruppen* was a critical element in achieving diversity in both land use and architectural style. An important prerequisite for allowing this resident-led development approach was the ability of the City of Tübingen to obtain the right to purchase the redevelopment area, allowing it to make the important strategic decisions governing the important qualities of a place and to sell individual building plots directly to the *Baugruppen* on a competitive basis.

In the French Quarter, diversity in the built environment was developed through an iterative process, in the first instance through the development of a strategic planning framework covering the whole development area, and then through detailed proposals for each building plot created by small development groups, or *Baugruppen*, of prospective residents. The city planning authority developed the rudimentary strategic plan, a structural and spatial framework that set out objectives for the different areas of the French Quarter development area. Working with this outline plan, more detailed plans were developed for specific sites within the development area, using sketches which were then presented to the public. Prospective residents were invited to form co-operative groups or *Baugruppen* of prospective group self-builders. The groups were able to view the outline proposals for the site, to voice their wishes and ideas, and also to demonstrate what they could potentially contribute to help achieve the desired land-use mix of an area. The *Baugruppen* would develop plans for a specific building plot (or a part of an old building) on which the city would issue a purchase option. In this way, a preliminary concept of the mixture was created, then developed collaboratively in a further planning phase by a range of further stakeholders, including the city (for public buildings including schools and nurseries), other public bodies including the university (for student accommodation), prospective small businesses (studios, craft shops, workshops), and the *Baugruppen*. In the French Quarter, each new building was obliged to have non-residential activity on the ground floor, intended to generate tight integration between different land uses. Reflecting on the aspiration for a mixed, diverse and integrated neighbourhood at the French Quarter, Roskamm (2013) notes that:

It was always emphasized in Tübingen that the optimal mixed city can be achieved, above all, by being open to new and different lifestyles. Other planning priorities included co-operation among business, media, science and cultural institutions, as well as the restoration of public spaces for communal everyday use. The focus has therefore been expanded by complementing the model of a mixed city with the notion of solidarity. From the outset, it was not only about the fair distribution of residential areas, but also about group affiliation in an urban neighbourhood within a 'randomly diverse society' (Feldtkeller [2001], 278). The yardstick was to explore 'in particular what children and youth' would make of our plans. Overall, as expressed with great conviction in Tübingen, a mixed city would need structures that can be fully integrated, robust, able to manage conflict, largely self-regulating, designable and changeable (ibid.). The interpretation of the term mixture in the South of Tübingen differs crucially from most of the other mix projects of the 1990s. The focus is less on mixing (*mischen*), and more on getting involved (*mit-mischen*). The (structural) establishment of this mixed urban construction, probably viewed as the most successful example of its type in Germany, is far less important than its focus on concepts such as openness, enabling and providing as well as the establishment of public spaces (architectural-spatial but also discursively-organizational).

Roskamm goes on to add:

It is also clear in Tübingen, however, that such a form of co-mixing is only possible under certain circumstances. Prerequisites for success in Tübingen included, among others, the presence of vacant buildings, the power to dispose of land, the use of significant financial resources, a strong will and an ability to work against existing legal planning restrictions, the inclusion/integration of diverse players and not least an administration that is willing and able to withdraw at certain points during the planning process.

Public engagement is an activity that is strongly interlinked with public relations. It must be remembered that functional diversity only arises during the implementation process – as an outcome of dialogue and development. It may therefore be clearly stated that 'mixed use cannot be planned'. Planning is only possible in an iterative (learning) process. Experience shows, however, that the process and the results are not as

fragile and unpredictable as it may at first seem – because it is in the interests of all stakeholders to achieve a physical environment and functionality of the highest possible quality.

Conceptual issues

The generally perceived wisdom is that the market is against mixed-use development. In reality, however, when we say 'the market' we are in fact discussing the 'established' market as it currently performs. The established market is based on planning laws in conjunction with land utilisation ordinances and other regulations, developed to separate incompatible land uses during industrialisation. Acting in opposition to functional diversity, orthodox planning separates residential districts – in which only non-disruptive commercial uses are permitted – from commercial areas, which primarily serve to accommodate commercial enterprises that, in reality, are hardly disruptive. When we consider that cities and communities are in competition to attract investment for the economic growth of their communities, we can see how small consumer-oriented businesses have been replaced by larger enterprises that have settled in purpose-built industrial parks. Neighbourhoods with a truly diverse mix of functions will only prevail in future if, with the support of local planning authorities and civic bodies, they promote those businesses that thrive on close proximity to residential areas (see Nordbüro der norddeutschen Handwerkskammern, 1993; Läpple and Walter, 2000), and if the use of space by housing and transport through regional planning is limited more predictably and even more drastically in the future than previously. A mixed-use zone can only compete with a commercial area if it is very well connected to the public transport system. Therefore, it is important early on to integrate new mixed urban quarters with high-quality public transport infrastructure.

Self-build development

Baugruppen

Single-use areas, such as residential districts, industrial parks and shopping malls, tend to be developed speculatively, to address demand that is latent or assumed rather than actual. This speculative investment and development model is difficult to apply to schemes where functional diversity forms the overall objective, and which requires the reuse of old buildings in varying states of dilapidation. In Tübingen, the local

development industry opted not to get involved with the redevelopment of the French Quarter site, fearing that residential properties in a mixed-use area would be difficult to market, and particularly where car use and car parking would be restricted. It was not the original intention to redevelop the French Quarter site through *Baugruppen*; rather, these prospective resident groups emerged during public consultation over the outline development proposals undertaken by the urban redevelopment office.

The *Baugruppen* development process is rather different from the pathway followed by a typical developer, and at the French Quarter typically involved the following steps:

- The development agent (urban redevelopment office) attracts interested self-builders through the marketing of potential development plots for groups.
- In general, housing follows quite a simple development pathway, but it is rather more difficult for businesses that wish to locate to a mixed-use zone.
- Therefore, candidates are sought who, while seeking a residence for themselves, are also prepared both to accommodate a commercial business on the ground floor of their (as yet) undesignated site and to identify an appropriate business to collaborate with the group as a joint consortium.
- A proposal is developed incorporating both residential and commercial aspects of the build, and the outline development options generated by the consortium are presented to the public.
- Several consortia may be interested in developing a particular plot; negotiations are undertaken to identify the most appropriate group.
- Each consortium is invited to submit an outline plan, including the proposal for a commercial enterprise in their scheme, which is co-ordinated by a 'competent person' – typically a professional such as an architect or project manager – who makes the application for development.
- A local authority steering committee reviews the different bids and assigns plots to the consortia, which are obliged to purchase the plot and to proceed with their development proposal.
- The purchase price for the land property is determined by an expert committee of the city and is based on actual current value plus associated costs rather than a speculative value under competitive market conditions.

- Detailed design work and costing are commenced by the *Baugruppen* – the development process is professionally managed.
- The *Baugruppen* undertakes to contractually secure the commercial use of the allocated non-residential space, either for purchase or rent.

This model was established back in the early years of the project planning and has now become an established method of development across the city and surrounding localities. Although there were initial doubts about the usefulness of this unusual procedure, it has become a relatively common practice in southern Germany and in other cities (see Wirtschaftsministerium Baden-Württemberg, 1999). Over the longer term, households are not obliged to remain in the scheme. Household turnover is modest but significant, although such is the popularity of these schemes that vacancies are usually seized quickly. Wholesale resignations by an entire building are very rare.

Self-build construction and public space

In the French Quarter, mixed-use development has been achieved through the collaboration of a wide range of stakeholders, including private small and medium-sized enterprises (typically situated in the buildings of the former barracks), public institutions of the city (running nurseries, youth clubs and student accommodation) and the *Baugruppen* – which incorporated smaller craft and manufacturing businesses, service providers such as GPs or bicycle repairers and offices into the ground floors of their buildings. However, not only has self-build provided the means to achieve genuine mixed-use development, but in turn these small, diverse and mixed-use buildings can also be seen to encourage street life, attracting activity and movement, and providing natural surveillance. Such activity, in turn, encourages incidental social interaction and mixing, including between groups who may not ordinarily do so. In this way, self-build as a construction method has opened the door to a continuous process of neighbourhood mixing and reshaping. In this respect, chance is given its own role just as it is when rolling a dice: mixing creates the basis for random encounters.

Baugruppen: the motives of members

Why has the *Baugruppen* model proven to be such a good investment model? A systematic survey on the motivations of *Baugruppen* members has not yet been undertaken, but it is possible to make the

following assumptions, based on the experiences of some residents both in the French Quarter and in other comparable schemes in other parts of the city:

1. The motives for participating in the *Baugruppen* largely result from Tübingen being an attractive university town with a continuous stream of incomers despite the high cost of housing. In all likelihood, many French Quarter residents would initially have preferred to acquire a home through a different means, such as via a housing association rather than in a mixed-use zone, but such is the city's long-term housing shortage that this has often not been an option. Nearby towns and villages have also failed to build sufficient, or sufficiently high-quality, new quarters to deflect interest away from Tübingen itself.

2. *Baugruppen* provide an attractive alternative to the mainstream development route. This is partly because they allow households to shape their own living quarters and because of the responsibility given to members for managing their schemes, which has been stripped away in a market-driven system that may be described as 'city-planning Fordism' (Hoffmann-Axthelm, 1993). The *Baugruppen* approach allows members to exert a measure of direct control over the built environment.

3. There are significant cost advantages in self-build construction, particularly because the *Baugruppen* acquire undeveloped land from the city and the land transfer tax is payable only on the purchase of land and not – as it is for developers – on the total construction costs. In addition, *Baugruppen* avoid the charge based on the developers' profits from marketing the property. Finally, each member of the *Baugruppen* enjoys greater freedom of choice in aligning the allocation of construction costs with personal wishes of the building design and construction.

4. Although the opportunity to relocate to a development with short distances and small-scale mixed-use planning is not a significant motivator for all *Baugruppen* members, it does seem to be for some of them, such as those wishing to reconcile work and family life or those seeking employment close to home for other reasons.

5. Other motivations may include the social opportunities that come from participating in a development project, although this is likely to vary considerably between schemes.

6. Lastly, the special car reduction measures (limited and expensive car parking) implemented across the French Quarter and the wider Tübinger Südstadt might be seen negatively by some. But others may regard the 'city of short distances' planning approach to be very positive – especially for children, the disabled and the elderly.

Outlook for the future

Do we have to learn to think constructively in terms of neighbourhood structures?

The term 'late-urbanisation' means creating diverse, mixed-use spaces, at high urban density and within short distances. But we have not yet entered this new paradigm. Indeed, the problems that could be alleviated, or even avoided, by mixing different functions, are still not being tackled by changing neighbourhood structures. Rather they are tackled only in discrete, professional ways: transport problems by traffic measures; social problems through social action; 'social integration' through language and integration courses. Indeed, we may view a wide range of society's problems as stemming from separation, for which the segregationist principles on which many Western planning systems are founded must share some of the responsibility.

But has this situation really become more complex in the last two decades? The concept of a greater functional mix tends to be viewed as if the idea were to replace the previous models with a new one, rather than a return to a speculative built environment model. At present, there is no political and planning consensus to ensure that, in future, in the big cities and their agglomerations, urban mixed neighbourhoods will be located next to areas that will be specialised for specific tasks. To achieve this, the network for future urban cores – especially in the agglomerations, not only in the cities – needs to be defined and expanded in a targeted manner, in conjunction with transport infrastructure. Urban, mixed neighbourhoods would then have the chance to mature in their use, and to take on important tasks of inclusion. Currently, we are far from such a conception of urban development. It seems there is no party, group or discipline that would be willing to initiate the necessary discussion.

What are the goals?

In the national report of the German federal government at the 1996 Habitat II conference the social objectives of the small-scale mixed-use zone were clearly spelled out:

> Mixed usage is an urban vision that includes the functional mix of neighbourhoods (interweaving of living and working, as well as supply and leisure), social mixing … as well as structural and spatial mixing (design). … A rather small-scale mixed-use zone at neighbourhood level can (!) create the conditions for urbanity,

promoting neighbourhood life, promoting urban diversity, reducing separation and improving the living conditions of disadvantaged groups.

The objectives mentioned here include a certain idea of quality of life that is not shared by all in a multicultural and largely materialistic society. The 2007 Leipzig Charter, formulated ten years later, summarises the common goal differently:

> An important basis for efficient and sustainable use of resources is a compact settlement structure. This can be achieved by spatial and urban planning, which prevents the sprawl of urban neighbourhoods. In doing so it must be assured that the land supply is monitored and speculations are being curbed. The strategy of mixing housing, employment, education, supply and recreational use in urban neighbourhoods has proven here to be particularly sustainable.

At the present time, the priority for planning is no longer on tolerance and justice, but on an efficient use of non-renewable resources and protection of the natural environment. Mixed usage would be a successful method to make economic use of space by incorporating different functional uses in the existing, largely separated settlements to establish a balance (a mosaic) between the two models of separating and mixing.

Even in the once small-scale mixed-use downtown neighbourhoods such a balance no longer exists. Policy and planning unfortunately missed out on the opportunity to establish new dense and functionally mixed neighbourhood models in the newly developed city sectors resulting from late industrial economic reorganisation. This is due to the fact that in politics the idea still prevails that there is still sufficient developable land available. However, the current sustainability strategy pursued by the German federal government sets a limit of 30 hectares per day for new building, housing and transport nationwide from 2020. Once a similar date has been set for the end of landscape consumption, the illusion that there is still enough space to be profligate with land will be erased.

13
Turning the theory into reality

Ted Stevens

Like millions of other people, I had dreamt of building my own home for decades – ever since I started out as an architectural journalist in my twenties. I eventually managed to do it in my early fifties. It took many years of relentless detective work to find an affordable site, two years of negotiations with the planners and then 18 months of hard work managing my contractor to ensure the house was built to the right standard. The end result was great, but it was a gruelling process.

A couple of years after I completed my house, a friend phoned me. He had just bought a publishing business, and one of the titles he had acquired was a specialist self-build magazine. He knew nothing about self-build so he asked me to spend a few months working out how the magazine could be developed and made more profitable. The first thing I tried to do was unearth some information about the scale of the self-build industry, but very little data was available as there was no trade organisation or professional body that represented the sector. So, I called a meeting of a few of the key individuals and several of the larger companies that were active in self-build, and I argued that we needed to set up an organisation to encourage the government to make it easier for people to self-build.

Because I did most of the talking I ended up being voted in as the chair of the National Custom and Self Build Association (NaCSBA). That was in 2008. It is only now, after years of lobbying, that there is evidence that the sector is beginning to grow. The length of time it has taken has been hugely frustrating and is partly due to the economic downturn.

With hindsight, it probably isn't that surprising, especially if you compare it with the timescales that were involved in developing the

self- and custom-build housing sectors in other European countries. In Germany and Holland, it took the best part of a decade to get the first large, innovative projects under way (for example, Tübingen's French Quarter, discussed by Feldtkeller, this volume, and Freiburg's Vauban developments in the 1990s – see Hamiduddin, this volume), and arguably it has taken another decade for the 'ripple effect' to spread the concept more widely across Continental Europe.

In the UK, we now have our first major project on site (Graven Hill's 1,900-home development, where the infrastructure work has begun and the first plots are currently up for sale). We have also generated a lot of excitement, interest and confidence among individuals and groups, which is also beginning to bear fruit too. For example, as yet unpublished data collated by the Building and Social Housing Foundation, documents more than 750 community-led housing groups that are looking to build. Of these, 225 community land trusts expect to deliver a further 3,000 new homes by 2020. Across England, tens of thousands of individuals are also believed to have put their names down on their local authority demand registers.

A survey by IPSOS Mori on behalf of NaSBA, conducted in April 2016, suggested that one in eight Britons were then researching how to undertake a self-build project; and one in 50 adults (approximately one million people) expected to buy a plot, get planning permission or start building their new homes over the coming year (IPSOS Mori, 2016).

The scale of self-building across the rest of Europe is impressive, even if some of the statistics are difficult to rely on as many countries define 'self-build' in different ways. In its early days, NaCSBA unearthed a report that included an infamous chart (produced in the 1990s) that set out the proportion of new homes that were self-organised across different countries. Despite the dubious statistics, the chart had a big impact as it suggested that the UK was the poor relation of Europe – the figures identified that Britain built barely 10 per cent of all its new homes this way, while most other nations generated a third to a half of all their new homes via various forms of self-build.

When you look closely at the self- and custom-build housing sectors in Continental Europe, it is clear a great deal has been achieved. It is even more impressive if you go to see some of the hundreds of innovative developments that have been delivered.

In many rural areas in Europe, local councils now see it as part of their job to routinely supply a stream of affordable serviced building plots for local residents who want to build a home for themselves.

Figure 13.1a & b Tübingen's (top) and Freiburg's (bottom)
pioneering projects (© Ted Stevens)

Consequently, it is possible to buy a plot for less than £15,000 in much of
rural France. The local councils facilitate these plots because it helps to
reduce rural depopulation. The same is true in Germany and Spain: on
the edge of most villages and towns there are serviced building plots
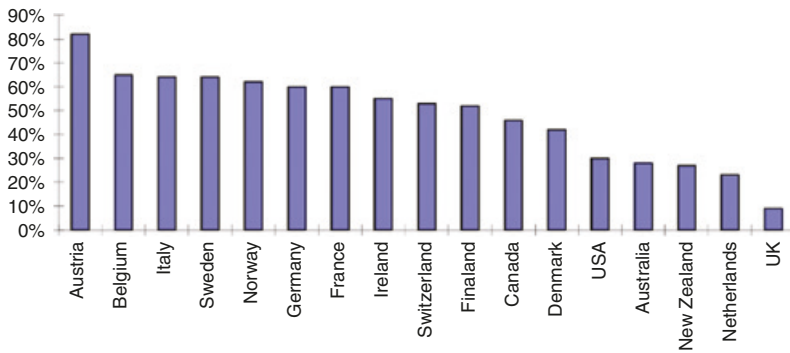
Figure 13.2 The 'infamous chart', produced on the basis of findings reported in Duncan and Rowe (1992)

readily available. They are as easy to buy as a car, and in many cases they are cheaper.

In urban areas across Continental Europe, hundreds of innovative group self-build projects have been completed, where collectives come together to organise more affordable housing or build the sort of homes property developers don't construct. Across Europe, city councils often 'reserve' a proportion of any land that becomes available for residential use for new group housing projects. They offer the land at a set price (usually the market rate), they often facilitate/support groups that want to bid for the land, and they give them time to work out what to build and to raise the necessary finance. The group that is selected is often chosen based on the social/community/environmental benefits their homes will deliver (not the highest price, or the design).

In some cities thousands of homes have already been built this way. In 2014, for example, a sixth of all the new homes constructed in Berlin were delivered by collectives. The group projects are nearly always built to *Passivhaus* standard or above and they frequently trial new materials or technologies. The layout of the homes breaks with norms, too, with features such as 'cluster apartments' and new approaches to communal or shared spaces. Many of them have also employed innovative financial models – co-operatives that part own/part rent the properties, peer-to-peer lending (where those with more money help to finance those with less) and clever interest-free 'top-up' loans to help younger families build their first home.

I have been involved in organising a number of study trips to Germany, France and the Netherlands to explore a wide cross section of innovative projects. The delegates have ranged from doubtful

Figure 13.3 MPs and others on a tour around some of Berlin's most interesting group projects (© Ted Stevens)

government ministers and local councillors to cynics from the press; architects, valuers and surveyors; council housing officers and social housing providers; old-fashioned contractors, developers and even some of the large housebuilders. Virtually all of them has been impressed by what they have seen.

Delegates from the UK have also been impressed by the scale of self- and custom-build across Europe, amazed by the creativity, the community cohesiveness that's been delivered and the cost-effectiveness of the homes that are being built. They have been inspired too; for example, partly as a result of the first study tour organised to the Netherlands in 2011, Cherwell District Council decided to borrow tens of millions of pounds to undertake the Graven Hill project.

Although these study trips inspire people, attendees often return with a feeling of bewilderment too. The question they regularly ask is: 'Why can't we do the same in the UK?'

I am convinced it is possible to make it happen here too, and I believe the foundations for the transformation of the self- and custom-build sectors have now been laid. The number of homes is currently on the increase – self-build output rose from around 10,000 homes in 2014

to approximately 12,500 in 2015.[1] With the right strategy and support, I'm confident that this can be increased to 20,000 homes over the next few years, and there is the potential for output to reach 30,000 homes by 2030. In the long term, the sector could contribute 50,000 or more homes a year.

So, how do we build on these foundations and deliver a quantum leap forward in self- and custom-build housing in the UK? In my opinion there are seven key issues that need to be addressed.

1. Political vision, bravery and leadership are vital

Many of the most impressive self-build developments in Europe happened because they were championed by the local mayor or another senior politician. In the UK, there are lots of enthusiastic local council housing and planning officers; they are typically would-be self-builders themselves, inspired by *Grand Designs*, but also keen to support others that want to build their own homes. It is very rare, however, for a council officer, on their own, to deliver a radical new way of facilitating land for self-build housing. Real breakthroughs like this tend to happen when an officer also has the full backing of their council leader or other senior local politicians.

Two of the best examples of the impact strong political backing can have are Almere in the Netherlands and Strasbourg in France. The ground-breaking *Homeruskwartier* project in Almere (a new town a few miles east of Amsterdam) was first conceived in 2006. At this time, Almere's local alderman (equivalent to the leader of the council) was a seasoned politician called Adri Duivesteijn. He had spent many years wrestling with Holland's large housebuilders, trying to get them to support the construction of his new town. Frustrated and angered by their shenanigans, he wrote his own 'manifesto' for the next phase of the town, and declared that it would be constructed by its citizens, not by developers. He then hired a master planner to devise the layout for the *Homeruskwartier* district, he drummed up media support, and he staged an event to gauge levels of public interest. He admits that he was unsure if it would work in the early stages, but after that first event, where the streets were gridlocked by the cars of people trying to get to the venue, he was 100 per cent committed.

Strasbourg's mayor, Roland Ries, initially doubted that people could organise the construction of their own homes. In 2010, he went

to see the Eco-Logis co-housing project,[2] a delightful 11-home scheme in the heart of Strasbourg that transformed a derelict eyesore into a show-case environmentally friendly housing development. The homes were built for a modest price and the people involved had become pillars of the local community. Ries was so impressed that he tasked one of his council officers with identifying other derelict plots across the city that could be used for community-led housing projects. A total of 16 parcels of land were identified, briefs were drawn up, the sites were marketed in 2014 and the best groups were selected. Now, nearly 140 new homes have been constructed on these sites.

There is evidence that similar champions are also having a real impact in the UK too. For example, Jeremy Christophers, the leader of Teignbridge Council in South Devon, has, almost single-handedly, driven through a raft of measures to encourage more self-build in his area. He appreciated the benefits of self-build as he had built his own home and, following a study trip to the Netherlands to see the impact of projects there, was convinced that his council could and should do more. As a result, Teignbridge introduced the first planning policies that required

Figure 13.4   The Eco-Logis development convinced the local mayor to support similar projects (© Ted Stevens)

all major housebuilding projects to include 5 per cent of the plots for self-builders.[3] Collectively, this policy has already generated scores of opportunities across the district. Christophers also volunteered Teignbridge to become one of the government's vanguard councils to trial the 'Right to Build' legislation, and the council also supported an innovative affordable self-build scheme at Broadhempston.[4]

Barry Down, the leader of Cherwell District Council, is another UK politician who has become a passionate advocate of self-build. His council borrowed almost £30 million to purchase a large former Ministry of Defence site so that it could deliver the Graven Hill development. While the council officers were keen, without Barry's support to secure the purchase of the land it is doubtful that the initiative would have progressed. These examples all demonstrate the impact high-level political support can deliver.

The importance of political backing was formally acknowledged in the Netherlands when it introduced its 'expert team' initiative. The terms of this initiative clearly state that the subsidy to support the cost of expert advice is available *only* if local politicians are on-side too.

There are more than 500 local councils across the UK. At present, just a handful are really proactive and almost all of these are supported by local politicians who 'get' the potential, and understand the benefits this form of housing can bring. To have real impact we need hundreds of council leaders to make a leap of faith and back the growth of the sector.

2. Demand is God

The new Right To Build legislation now requires all English councils to set up a demand register where local people (and groups) can put their names on a 'waiting list' for a plot of land. The registers have the potential to make or break the sector. If council leaders see thousands of people registering they will take action (as it is impossible to ignore thousands of potential voters). If only a handful of people register, politicians will be able to quietly ignore the sector.

Research undertaken by IPSOS Mori over the last three years consistently suggests that millions of people should be keen to register. By the end of 2016, most councils had set up a register, but many of them seem to be 'non-compliant' and there is no way, at present, of easily aggregating the data to get a nationwide figure of how many people have registered. The number of people registering is very dependent on how

well councils advertise their registers. The reality is that local promotion has generally been low-key, and many would-be self-builders still don't know that they can (and should) register.

Most of the original 11 vanguard councils have had registers for more than a year, and typically each of these has attracted 200 to 500 people, alongside a handful of groups. Cherwell Council's register is the exception with more than 3,000 people on its list.

A privately operated 'Custom Build Register'[5] covering the whole of the UK has more than 35,000 people on it, and the Self Build Portal's 'Need-a-Plot' facility,[6] launched in 2013, now has many thousands of registrants; the map on this website is especially helpful for identifying the areas where there is the most demand (the south and southeast are particularly popular).

NaCSBA conducted a freedom of information request to all local councils in the autumn of 2016 and this suggested that upward of 15,000 people had by then registered. This is not a small number, but it is nowhere near the six to seven million people that IPSOS Mori estimate are currently interested in building their own homes, and it is a long way short of the one million people who indicated they want to construct a new home for themselves in the coming year. I believe one of the main
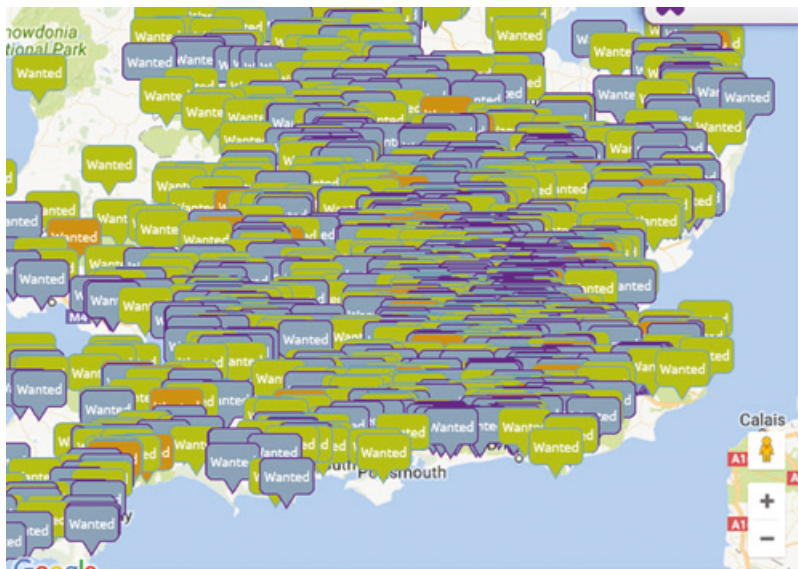
Figure 13.5 The density of the 'Plots Wanted' notices on the Self Build Portal gives a fair indication of the level of demand around the UK

priorities for the sector now is to push hard to promote the registers and to encourage as many people as possible to get their names on them. The sector also needs to collate the numbers across all the registers so that it can remind politicians of the total. Ideally, it needs to be able to say, during 2017, that more than 50,000 people have now registered, and it needs to update this figure every few months so that politicians, both locally and nationally, have a sense of the large proportion of the population keen to self-build. Everyone from *Grand Designs* (and the other home building TV programmes) to the industry's three main magazines and all the trade exhibitions need to encourage people to register with their councils.

There is also an argument for the wider housing sector to encourage registrations too – for example, local council housing teams, affordable housing providers, small building contractors and homeless charities like Shelter should all direct people to these registers. The same is true of more specialist agencies like the Community Land Trust Network and the Cohousing Network. The sector also needs to encourage councils in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to establish registers.

With a really big push, I am sure more than a million people will in time register, and when the figures get up to this level, all politicians will take note. But the converse is true too: if the demand is not proven, politicians will put their weight behind something else that is attracting wider support from their electorates.

3. Seeing is believing

It is easy to flick-read a glossy self-build magazine or surf a website and admire images of wonderful projects from overseas. It is also easy to dismiss this as something that wouldn't work in the UK. In my experience there is no substitute for taking people to see innovative self-build projects and meet the families that have made them happen. People then recognise that they *can* do something similar here.

Over the last two years, thanks to the Nationwide Foundation's support of NaCSBA's research programme, I have visited scores of pioneering self-build projects across Europe. Our team also examined numerous projects in Australia and across North and South America too. Seeing these innovative projects in the flesh has a huge impact and it makes the idea of delivering a self-build revolution in the UK much more feasible. Inevitably, the projects that tend to have the most impact are the ones that look like they can easily be transplanted or replicated in the UK.

So, for example, there is a small terraced development in the eastern suburbs of Berlin built by a group called Eleven Friends.[7] It is a simple row of properties on a tight site, but every home has been customised to suit each family. Working collaboratively, the group saved themselves a small fortune – a typical four bedroom, 140 m² town house cost £185,000 in 2011, including the land. Terraces like this could be parachuted into just about any town or city in the UK.

Many German councils proactively assemble land so that people can build their own homes. When you see a development where hundreds of new homes have been facilitated using these processes you inevitably ask yourself why the UK can't do the same.

Across South America, tens of thousands of very low-cost homes have been built by housing co-operatives. In the USA, more than 50,000 low-cost homes have been facilitated via a self-help housing programme initiated by the US Department of Agriculture. In the Scottish Highlands, a local housing trust is providing affordable serviced plots to help local people on lower incomes build their own homes. On a former airfield on the edge of Vienna, six building groups are involved in a massive regeneration scheme. In Amsterdam, a condemned 1960s housing block

Figure 13.6   The Eleven Friends terrace of homes in Berlin (© Ted Stevens)

has been repurposed to provide 500 low-cost flats that people can 'self-finish' to match their requirements. Almost everywhere you look overseas there are inspirational projects that people can learn from and be inspired by.

To really get people passionate about this form of housing, the sector needs to organise regular study trips to places like Almere, Leiden, Amsterdam, The Hague, Hamburg, Berlin, Tübingen and Strasbourg. There are also lessons to be learned in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland too. If people can visit these projects, if they meet the occupants and understand how they did it, they can appreciate that the same sort of homes could be delivered in the UK too. The study trips should be open to politicians, the media, community organisations, planners, housing associations and small builders and developers. To help 'convert' thousands more people, the sector needs to organise numerous trips each year.

If key influencers have any doubt about what can be achieved, encourage them to hop on a ferry or grab a budget flight to see what has already been achieved on our European doorstep. The case studies on the Right to Build Toolkit website are a good initial source of information to work out what you might want to go and see.

Figure 13.7 The FUCVAM self-build co-operative housing initiative in Uruguay (Photo credit: BSHF)

4. Don't reinvent the wheel, use the proven processes that work in Europe

Many other European countries are 20 years ahead of us. Over the last two decades they have tried numerous approaches and refined them, so the processes they use now really work. We just need to import the same processes and broadly apply them here. We don't need to reinvent the wheel or fumble our way through a time-consuming and expensive learning curve.

A good example is the way Continental European countries allocate land for collective self-builds. In Germany and the Netherlands, and increasingly in France, a portion of all major housing sites are now routinely reserved for groups. These parcels of land are sold at a fixed price (usually the going market rate for the land), development briefs are drawn up, groups are given time to work out what they want to build, and they are usually selected based on the best concepts that are submitted (not the highest price). The result is much better place-making and stronger community cohesiveness, real innovation and usually dwellings that meet high ecological standards.

In rural areas, many local councils in Europe have developed tried and tested ways of delivering low-cost serviced plots. Usually, this involves the council directly engaging with farmers or other landowners to acquire land at agricultural (or just above) prices. The council then secures planning for residential use and prepares the plots ready for sale. They don't over-engineer the service roads, they keep the utility connections simple and cost-effective, and sometimes they work with utility providers to underwrite some of the servicing costs. Often, they prepare a simple design guide or plot passports that explain what can (or can't) be built on the plot. The plots have fixed prices, passing on cost savings generated through purchasing the land at agricultural value and low servicing costs. In addition, sometimes sales to local residents are prioritised.

Some of these lessons have already found their way into the UK, though all too often we take something that is simple and then make it complex again. A good example are the plot passports at Graven Hill, which are far more technical and three or four times as long as their European counterparts!

The details of how councils and others do things in Continental Europe are all clearly set out on the Right to Build Toolkit website. This website contains the equivalent of more than 500 pages of information,

Figure 13.8   Self-build plots like these in France often cost less than a new car (© Ted Stevens)

so councils and housing providers cannot argue that there is no best practice guidance available to help them.

The new 'Expert Taskforce' that NaCSBA has set up will subsidise half the cost of the expert consultancy advice organisations may need to work out exactly how to tackle a specific challenge on a specific site. If organisations cannot find the answers on the Toolkit, they will be able to get a bespoke solution by tapping into one of the independent experts on the Taskforce's panel.

5. Trust people

In the UK, we tend to micro-manage everything, so the tortuous process of getting planning permission and ensuring a new home complies with building regulations usually takes us many months and can cost tens of thousands of pounds. We require would-be self-builders to submit detailed architects' plans and usually samples of proposed materials. Often self-builders have to provide complex design and access statements, flood risk assessments, ecological reports and tree surveys, too. In Continental Europe the process is usually simpler, much quicker and far less expensive. European councils have more faith in their citizens and they believe they can be trusted (with a little light-touch support) to deliver their own homes to the right standards.

On the first study trip I helped to arrange to the Netherlands, our delegation included a number of medium to large contractors and housebuilders. On the first night, at the British Embassy in The Hague, we organised a question and answer session with a panel of Dutch experts

who had been involved in the pioneering self-build projects we had visited. I will always remember a couple of the questions that were asked by our delegates.

The first was from one of the UK's largest housebuilders, who wanted to know how long it took to secure planning permission for a typical self-build home in Almere. The chief planner from Almere admitted that, in the early stages, it took several weeks, but they quickly recognised that this was holding up the building programme, so they found a way of streamlining the process. This involved the introduction of plot passports that clearly set out what is allowed on each plot. The passports usually have a handful of restrictions, so, provided a house fits within the guidelines, permission is automatically granted. 'So how long does it *now* take?' asked the UK housebuilder. Almere's chief planner said that on average it took between two and three days. There was an audible thud as the jaws of the British delegates hit the floor.

The other question was from a smaller UK contractor. He wanted to know how the council checked that the construction work was done to the right standards. Almere's alderman, Adri Duivesteijn, was a little surprised by this question. He explained to the delegates that in the Netherlands councils trust people to build to the standards set out in their building regulations. 'We think that people will not want to electrocute their children, and that they will want the toilets to work properly,' he said.

Britain's planning system, and its building regulations need to be streamlined to help speed up, simplify and reduce the cost of building a home. Of course, all new homes need to comply with building regulations, but I would argue that the work could be signed off as being compliant by the self-builders' architect, main contractor or surveyor. At present, we make the whole process very challenging and expect people who want to build their own homes to effectively pick up many of the core skills of a professional planner, a construction consultant, a lawyer and mortgage broker. That is a lot to expect from someone who does not work in any of these professions.

The Dutch have also demystified the process by introducing 'plot shops' staffed by teams who don't use technical jargon. At the plot shop, you can identify which plot is best for you, you can easily work out what will be permitted on the plot and you can get independent advice on finance. Dutch self-builders can also hire a trusted 'technical coach' to co-ordinate the construction process for them. Surely we can make the process simpler and easier here too?

6. Remember, land is the key

In recent years, NaCSBA has undertaken a number of surveys to identify the biggest hurdles facing people who want to build. These surveys have always identified the availability of affordable land as being the most significant blockage. The latest survey, conducted in late 2015,[8] showed that finding a suitable plot is almost four times as challenging as anything else (securing finance, obtaining planning permission, and navigating all the complex information that self-builders need to get their heads around).

Based on the fact that about one million people say they want to start building a home over the next 12 months and roughly 12,500 self-builds are currently completed annually, it appears that barely one in a hundred would-be self-builders currently manages to get their project underway. This is principally because, at present, frustrated would-be self-builders cannot find a plot of land that they can afford.

This is why the new regulations introduced in October 2016 as part of the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 require councils to provide serviced plots (with the principle of planning all in place) to match the demand shown on their registers. This is the priority: if affordable plots are readily available, the rate of self-building will rapidly increase.

There is already good evidence that providing ready-to-build plots works. For example, a Teesside developer sold all 27 plots on a large site near Hartlepool in a matter of weeks. Over the last two years, kit home company Potton has assembled ten sites across the country to help its customers build their own homes. The first of these, known as French Fields near St Helens, had 18 plots and all were sold to Potton customers

BIGGEST CHALLENGES
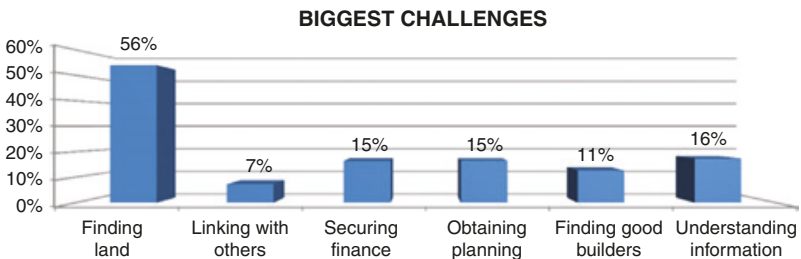
Figure 13.9 Results of NaCSBA survey relating the key barriers to self-build

Figure 13.10 The homes on the first Potton site near St Helens are now coming out of the ground (© Buildstore)

very quickly. The other Potton sites are all selling briskly and will provide opportunities for more than 100 of its customers.

In Kent, Quinn Estates trialed a serviced plot scheme on a site near Sandwich. All 19 plots were snapped up quickly. Kevin McCloud's custom-build business HAB has also experienced strong demand. Its first major development in Hampshire has seen exceptional levels of interest with more than half the plots reserved within the first few days.

None of this should be surprising. In the Netherlands, where they have been releasing serviced plots on developments across the country for more than a decade, it is common for people to queue for days to secure land for their new home. Indeed, the queues in some parts of the country are now so long – in Amsterdam families have camped for six weeks to reserve a plot – that the authorities there are exploring less onerous ways of households securing an opportunity to build.

Councils and government agencies in the UK need to recognise that the provision of land is the key to kick-starting a self-build revolution. Councils can offer 'support' and advice to collectives that want to build, they can streamline the planning process, and perhaps they can persuade lenders to allocate more funds for self-build, but the provision of land is the main issue councils need to concentrate on.

Figure 13.11 Self-builders in Amsterdam camping in a car park for six weeks to get their plots (© Zelfbrouw Amsterdam)

The priorities for public-sector planners should therefore be identifying a steady supply of land to bring forward for self-build, and the facilitation of ready-to-go serviced plots. At the moment, it is mainly the private sector that is delivering plots, and these are mostly aimed at people with generous budgets, so they tend to be fairly expensive, typically around the £300,000+ mark. In the first instance, the public sector needs to focus on facilitating reasonably priced serviced plots. This will then make self-build achievable for those on lower or median incomes.

7. The financial world needs to step up to the plate

At present, most self-builders have to source their mortgage from one of a handful of small local building societies. The interest rates they charge on self-build mortgages are often higher than on traditional mortgages, and the arrangement fees can be significantly higher too. Currently in the UK there is little real competition, so, compared to Europe, the overall costs of funding a self-build home here is usually much higher. Some of the UK's bigger banks and building societies are now showing genuine interest in developing new products to meet the needs of the sector. This interest must be nurtured so that more affordable/appropriate financial products become available in the future.

Lenders also need to understand the *genuine* risks associated with building your own home. At present, they appear to base much of their analysis on watching *Grand Designs*, which often features outrageously ambitious projects that go horribly over-budget (because this makes good TV). But the projects featured on *Grand Designs* are not typical self-builds. Anecdotally, I have heard that self-builders are six times *less* likely to default on their mortgage.

The professionalisation of the sector should, in time, help to reassure them. Lenders need to recognise that a fully serviced plot (that already has the principle of planning permission in place) should significantly reduce the risks associated with a self-build. They should also appreciate that people who build their home via a proven custom-build developer will have a lower risk exposure too, as will those who opt for off-site construction methods.

Up to now the new lenders have just been 'observing' the sector. None has made a bold move or launched anything especially new or innovative. They are inherently cautious people and before they do anything rash they will want to be convinced that the sector really is growing. The latest increase in output is helpful, but they will want to see solid evidence that this is an emerging trend, not a one-off blip.

Many of the larger lenders argue that the current model of self-build doesn't fit the way they now do business, as most new home mortgages are now processed online, and they say it is impossible to manage complex self-build mortgage applications this way. They also claim that the cost of developing new online systems is not justified by the current size of the self-build sector.

It was a bit like this in Continental Europe in the 1990s too. However, as the sector there has grown, professionalised and become more mainstream, the mortgages for self-build projects are now treated in just the same way as mortgages for new homes built by volume housebuilders. In Europe, self-build mortgages are available at the same low interest rates and purchasers do not have to raise higher deposits. The financial sector in Europe has also devised new products to help groups that want to build, and it has introduced interest-free top-up loans to assist people on low incomes to construct their first home. In the early stages, some of these products were guaranteed by the public sector, but increasingly financiers are now comfortable that the sector is no riskier than any other. Indeed, they point out that the eventual value of most completed self-build homes is significantly higher than the total cost of the land and construction work, so this provides a 'buffer' that makes lending to self-builders very safe.

Unfortunately, Britain's financial community is still very conservative, so it may take time for our lenders to come around to this perspective. The self-build sector needs to encourage potential new lenders, government needs to gently press the banks to trial new products, and the financial sector needs to wake up to the fact that there could be a great opportunity for those that get in quick. Remember, after land, one of the next main hurdles is securing finance.

Bringing all of this together is no small task. But, with continued lobbying, strong political support, the showcasing of innovative projects and the provision of sound guidance, I believe the rate of growth we are now experiencing will dramatically accelerate and that by 2020 more than 20,000 homes a year will be delivered this way.

14

Taking self-build out of its 'small and special box': citizens as agents for the political and the social of self-build

Stephen Hill

All forms of self-building are, to a greater or lesser degree, expressions of political as well as economic or social agency. Individuals and groups invest their time, money and social capital to achieve outcomes for themselves or their communities that the state or the market are unable or unwilling to provide. This chapter explores how citizens could become more effective political agents through community organising and locally accountable democratic institutions, not just in relation to their housing needs, but in other aspects of public life, both locally and nationally.

This exploration draws on the author's practical experience of working in both mainstream housing development and regeneration and in supporting self-organised groups of citizens to develop their own housing schemes since the mid-1970s, and the writing of four publications that are a mix of qualitative research, reflections on professional practice and polemical proposition-making:

- *The Future of Community Self-Build* (Hill et al., 2000), analysing the barriers to increased levels of community self-building and proposing changes to the national agency-led model of self-building;
- 'Time for a citizens' housing revolution' (Hill, 2009a), proposing the Right to Build and a political narrative for policies to promote individual and group self-building;
- 'Justice for the professions or a moment of destiny?' (Hill, 2009b), tracing the development of professional practice from the radical technical aid agencies supporting citizens in planning and housing in the 1970s up to today and the progressive erosion of the 'public interest' in professional practice; and

- *Property, Justice and Reason* (Hill, 2015), using first-hand experience of community land trusts (CLTs) and other forms of community housing in the UK, USA and Canada to explore how new forms of land ownership have been used to strengthen civil society institutions and the agency of citizens, both in opposition to and, mostly, in partnerships with the local or national state.

The last of these publications makes a strong case for community organising as a more effective and systemic means of enabling citizens to exercise power and control over their housing circumstances. In this chapter, I take a further look at community organising, using case study projects located in New York and London, comparing it with other ways of promoting 'community' or 'community-led' housing. I refer to the political narrative of community, derived from the modernising local government policy agenda of the New Labour government from 1997 to the mid-2000s, but from which the intended devolution of power to communities has long since been abandoned in favour of more limited programmes of community asset transfer, under New Labour, and then community rights of the Coalition government's Localism Act 2011.[1] In this way, I ask questions of the current political context of 'community housing' and suggest some possible strategies for the development of a more widely drawn movement of 'citizen-inspired' housing solutions as a more effective voice for the demand side in housing policy.

Self-build is great, but…

In 1999, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) commissioned a research study of future options for 'community self-build' housing in England and Scotland. The research question was, 'If community self-build housing has such positive social and economic outcomes for its participants, why was it so hard to make happen, and how could we do more of it?' It was jointly commissioned with the four self-build promotional agencies: Community Self-Build Scotland (CSB Scotland) and, from England, the Walter Segal Trust, the Young Builders Trust and the Community Self-Build Association (CSBA).

The interviews provided a valuable insight into the culture of mainstream housing politics at the time. As the report highlights (Hill et al., 2000), the agencies, charities working directly with people building their own homes, policy analysts and a few local authorities and housing associations had enormous enthusiasm for self-building and its many

beneficial outcomes, despite its undoubted complications. From many other interviewees, especially those in an official position in central or local government, or senior roles in mainstream housing providers, the reaction was mostly hostile, condescending and dismissive, unable to see how community self-build might meet wider public policy priorities.

This research also threw the spotlight so firmly and critically on the role and attitude of the agencies that they were unable to agree on the text of the summary findings which JRF usually produced to disseminate its research. In the absence of any agreement, no findings could be published; *The Future of Community Self-Build* was later published online independently, but with JRF's acknowledgement.

The four agencies' difficulties with the report's recommendations may have been a sign of things to come. Of the four agencies, only CSB Scotland had an appreciation of how self-build needed to be aligned with central and local government policies and priorities, or what role self-build might play in local housing markets and in local cultural and political contexts. The agencies did not have the resources to provide locally or regionally based expertise, but neither were they willing to adapt or develop entrepreneurial partnerships that could have expanded their localised capacity, whilst retaining a necessary but ideally unified national advocacy role. It is perhaps unsurprising then that, excepting CSBA, which continues to operate albeit at a low level, none of these agencies now exist as active promoters of self-build.

The current generation of agencies promoting their various approaches to 'community-led' or more accurately 'community-inspired' housing for co-operatives, community land trusts (CLTs), development trusts, co-housing and self-help housing must learn from that experience and how to survive through the careful and constant adaptation of both national and local functions, developing a unified national voice in policy advocacy and the promotion of good practice, whilst supporting and enabling local action for new and locally appropriate forms of housing.

Developing more attractive and powerful political narratives for self-build

The Future of Community Self-Build (Hill et al., 2000) was the start of a journey of exploration and developing practice, continuing through to my recent programme of research for the Churchill Fellowship in 2014 considering the relationship between the state and the citizen in the formulation and implementation of public policy. In the following section,

I draw on one of the nine political narratives developed for the Churchill Fellowship research, published as *Property, Justice and Reason* (Hill, 2015). It identifies the power of community organising as a means of mobilising citizens over an extended period to achieve the housing outcomes they wanted and needed. These narratives cover a wide range of housing approaches in different but mainly urban housing markets and political contexts.

Community organising as sustained street action to achieve systemic change in urban policy

The chosen narrative describes the situation in New York in the 1960s and 70s as having many similarities with the experience of low- and middle-income citizens in London today, at risk of economic and social displacement through the interplay of public policy (or its absence) and the impact of global financial market behaviour on local housing markets.

The story of Cooper Square Committee began in 1959. New York City Council was in clearance and highway building mode. Robert Moses was a 'city planner' of unparalleled powers through his political connections, with ambitions to remake Manhattan Island into a twentieth century city. Campaigners like Jane Jacobs in Greenwich Village and Frances Goldin on the Lower East Side had other ideas.

The Cooper Square Committee was formed to oppose the City of New York's Slum Clearance Plan, which would have razed much of the Lower East Side around Cooper Square, an intensely developed area of mixed uses. With local resident Frances Goldin driving a community organising process, the community designed a viable plan of their own to preserve over 300 buildings and prevent the displacement of several thousand people, including families, senior citizens, small businesses, workshops, artists and art organisations. Their main objectives were that existing residents should be the beneficiaries, not the victims, of the plan, and no resident should be forced to relocate outside the community.

After a decade of intense campaigning through community organising, and sometimes violent street demonstrations, the Committee eventually managed to have their 'Alternate Plan' adopted as the City of New York's official plan for the Lower East side in 1970. As Angotti's (2008) close documentation of the campaign reveals, community organising was undoubtedly central to this: 'The Alternate Plan would have died an early death if it weren't for the radical and often militant community organizing behind it' (2008, 119).

Between 1991 and 2006, the Committee modernised 356 homes in 22 formerly city-owned buildings for $20 million. When, in 2007, New York City Council redefined 'affordability' as up to 160 per cent of the Area Median Income, way beyond the means of lower-paid New Yorkers, the Committee started a process to strengthen its legal structure to safeguard the permanent and genuine affordability of its housing stock. The original Cooper Square Mutual Housing Association, a limited equity cooperative, separated itself from the underlying land interest, the freehold ownership of which was vested in a new CLT. Set up in 2013, the CLT now acts as a stand-alone independent custodian to protect land ownership and permanent affordability.

The current chair of the CLT, Harriett Putterman, explained in a research interview (April 2014) that it had not been an easy process:

> This was very much the idea of the older generation, who have been here since the beginning. They know what it took, and what the dangers are. We could have done a better job at explaining to the younger people here.

Figure 14.1   East 4th Street today, where Cooper Square Committee have their offices and community resource centre (© Stephen Hill)

However, the current activities of the Committee show their continuing commitment to their founding principles through taking an active role as community organisers in the housing politics of the city, helping in campaigns to support other tenants in the Lower East Side being exploited by landlords doing dangerous and probably illegal conversions and with plans to displace lower-income tenants (Cooper Square 2009: npg).[2]

Members of the Committee have also been involved in the establishment of the New York City Community Land Initiative (NYCCLI), an alliance of academics, social justice and affordable housing organisations trying to find new solutions to the housing problems of all New Yorkers. Their mission is to lay the 'groundwork for CLTs and other non-speculative housing models that promote development of housing and neighborhoods for and with community members not served by the private market' (NYCCLI, n.d.).

Picture the Homeless and the El Barrio CLT are two programmes of organising to have emerged from NYCCLI. In the former, homeless people have tried to change the nature of debate on homelessness, by conducting their own research into the number of empty properties in the city. This revealed that if all the city's empty homes were put back into use, they could house four times the number of people currently homeless in the city (Picture the Homeless, n.d.). They argue that CLTs are part of a solution that will enable empty properties brought back into use to be maintained as affordable homes in perpetuity. The latter is developing community organising capacity in East Harlem, a part of the city badly affected by Hurricane Sandy, trying to ensure that the existing community is not displaced by city council plans to renew the city's ageing and obsolete infrastructure. Their efforts over the five years since Hurricane Sandy struck in 2012 have now been rewarded with the formal adoption of CLTs as one option for the future ownership of new affordable housing in New York City's draft East Harlem Housing Plan.[3]

The NYCCLI initiative draws on the experience of the 'Alternate Plan'. In the 1960s, Goldin and her colleagues established the three basic principles that have since been widely adopted in neighbourhood and community planning policy, even if these principles are still not accepted and adopted everywhere:

- Displacement must be minimised.
- Development must be carried out in stages.
- Site tenants must have first priority for new housing and workspace.

Communities affected by major redevelopments all over the world, especially in cities in the developed world, are still having to fight for these basic principles to be incorporated into public policy, as a matter of course.

Both long-serving and newer members of the Cooper Square Committee clearly take the continuing responsibility of their institution very seriously, to ensure that the benefit of their experiences and learning are not lost. As 90-year-old Goldin recently stated, rather more colourfully:

> It took fifty fucking years! It should never be necessary to save a community, and work for fifty years – day after day, after day. But that's what it took, because we were fighting in the richest city (in the country), and we didn't give up.[4]

Lessons from Lower East Side – communities as successful long-term investors

Without community organising, it is certain that the Alternate Plan would never have gained the political traction that it ultimately did. Sustaining the citizens of the area over more than a decade to win the initial battle, and then over the following 40 years, it was community organising that enabled them to carry the project through. The result was the preservation and growth of a unique ecology of affordable housing, workspace and cultural life. The degree of affordability and protection against displacement achieved at Cooper Square, retaining equity within the neighbourhood for the benefit of its residents and businesses, would not have been a priority for any other kind of developer or investor.

The combination of political action with the activity of housing created a social and economic environment that is hard to achieve through rational planning or top-down policy from government. The orthodox political and development approach would, however, assume that the successful outcomes at Cooper Square could only have been achieved by (well-intentioned) commercial developers and their access to capital, and through a process of development in which some displacement would have to be accepted as inevitable and necessary. Cooper Square is a living witness to a viable and successful alternative way.

While there is limited evidence of such community organising succeeding in the UK, the lessons from the burgeoning CLT programme in England and Wales seem to support the assertions above. In rural areas, the rather genteel English model of community organising that

characterises social life in a village has been effective in creating the impetus for action on housing as an essential step in improving the quality of life in villages and small towns. It was assisted in the first instance by the Carnegie UK Trust, acting as catalyst in a proactive but generic programme of social change to improve the quality of life in rural areas in England and Scotland. Villages have then worked in partnerships with councils, which created a space where CLT projects have become normalised as a mainstream solution to getting new homes built in small settlements in rural areas.[5]

In urban areas, the experience of London Citizens and the East London Community Land Trust has shown that without community organising, and the political impact of London Citizens, the St Clement's Hospital project, London's first CLT,[6] would never have happened. It needed a sustained political campaign over a decade to secure the project

Figure 14.2 London mayor Boris Johnson 'laying the first brick' at the London CLT's first project at St Clement's Hospital, Bow, East London, in 2014 ... over 10 years after the first mayoral commitment to London Citizens to support a CLT in London on the Olympic Park. St Clement's became the 'pilot project' for the Olympic CLT, which has not yet happened (© Stephen Hill)

(now nearing completion), even though key politicians, such as the first two mayors of London, had publicly committed to supporting the establishment of a CLT. Neither of the two mayors nor their officials understood what they then needed to do to assist its establishment and development, whilst the relationship between them and community organisers often became fractious over their apparent political inaction.

Elsewhere, in urban areas, citizens' groups without community organising resources and skills find it much harder to gain and retain leverage on the political process. The following case study from a local authority housing estate in London illustrates how the influence of the hostile culture identified in *The Future of Community Self-Build* (Hill et al., 2000) continues to be a major drag on the ability of citizens to determine their own housing futures.

The 'willing souls' of the Andover Estate

The Andover Estate is a public housing estate of over 1,000 homes in a deprived ward in the North London borough of Islington, built in the 1970s, and with a reputation for being a difficult place to live. Despite its reputation, residents, especially young people on the estate, resented their representation as a 'problem estate' in the mainstream media, by the police and their council.[7]

The Finsbury Park Community Hub, a long-established community anchor organisation, was at the centre of an ambitious plan to regenerate the estate, to solve many of its seemingly intractable and long-standing challenges: overcrowding, under-occupation, unwelcoming and poorly designed and used public spaces between buildings, disused garages, lack of work and recreation opportunities for young people, loneliness and poor physical and mental health. Thinking ahead of the council's own plans to build new 'infill' homes on their estate, the community were awarded a small grant from the government's Neighbourhood Projects Small Grants Programme in 2011 (administered by the Design Council) to devise its own plans for more affordable (social) rented homes, identifying land for up to 170 new homes, compared with the council's estimate of about 30.

The then leader of the council was attracted by the opportunity to benefit not just from such a significant increase, but also the willingness of the community to embrace new homes, unlike other estates in the borough. 'Why don't we always do it this way?' she asked at the project stall at the 2013 *Soul in the City* community summer festival held on the estate and in the surrounding area. The council thus generously funded

Figure 14.3   Residents learning about land use analysis for the Andover Estate Development Plan (© Stephen Hill)

the Hub, with a non-returnable loan to develop the initial plans into a full estate masterplan. This community-initiated planning process had confirmed how the eyes and knowledge of people living on and around the estate bring a level of understanding and insight into possibilities that external professionals and council officials can rarely achieve on their own.

The Hub established the Andover Future Forum, following the guidelines for a statutory neighbourhood plan process, to oversee the production of the Andover Estate Development Plan.[8] The Forum worked closely with the council's planning and housing departments. The result was a comprehensive physical, social, environmental and economic regeneration plan, derived from the community's own understanding and knowledge of the challenges they faced. It was acknowledged as unique by the wider planning and development community (Sell, 2014) and acclaimed by Planning Resource with the national Placemaking Award for Regeneration (2013).[9]

The next stage in the story has followed a rather different course, as the council has clawed back control, refusing to consider the option of the new homes being owned by a co-operatively managed CLT that

Figure 14.4   Soul in the City festival at the Andover Estate, 2013
(© Stephen Hill)

would have achieved, amongst other objectives, permanent protection
for the new homes from the existing Right to Buy of council homes, or the
then proposed and later enacted compulsory sale of high-value council
homes. The council later shut down a joint council/community regener-
ation partnership, offered as an alternative to the CLT, that had been set
up to oversee the development of the project.

Lessons from the Andover Estate – politics at the heart of community housing

Despite being orphaned by the political leadership in Islington, the
Andover Estate project later featured in the *Anti-Gentrification Handbook
for Council Estates in London* (Just Space et al., 2014). The handbook
aimed to support council tenants who felt disempowered and disad-
vantaged at the hands of the property market and their local authority
landlords. Andover was held up as an exemplar of joint working with a
council before council authority was re-imposed.

The language of purposeful disempowerment and disrespect by
public officials, presumably sanctioned by their own elected repre-
sentatives, is striking. Far from being recognised as the prize-winning

community client and valued as a resource, a council email sent to members of the Forum described them as 'willing souls', implying that they could now hand back their leading role to the 'professionals'.[10] When the dispute between the community and the council escalated into the news and letter columns of the local papers, a senior council officer explaining the closure of the regeneration partnership was quoted in an article (Gruner, 2015) as claiming that residents wanted 'too much autonomy'. The concept of 'too much' in relation to autonomy is a puzzling one. Unwittingly, the attitude of this Islington council official exemplifies the gulf that exists between the practice of representative democracy by politicians and public officials and participative democracy as practised by citizens acting in their own and the public interest.

In the next section, I trace the emergence of community housing as a subject of political significance.

Time for a citizens' housing revolution

In 2009, I contributed an essay of this title and intent to an assessment of the post-crash housing market for the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (Hill, 2009a), proposing a statutory Right to Build. The essence of this was to liberate the potential of citizens to house themselves, urging citizens to be disruptors of the housing market and the financial and public policy systems that had resulted in an increasingly limited range of housing choices that were frequently unaffordable relative to local incomes and of poor design quality. The state was recast in a new enabling role vis-à-vis the citizen and community organisations through the use of planning policy, land assembly and financial support (see also Hill, 2013a, 2013b).

As a genuinely non-partisan policy idea, it was cautiously taken up by Labour's John Healey and then, with increasing enthusiasm, by subsequent Coalition and Conservative housing ministers – all five of them since 2010. The effective roll-out of policy into practice has been promoted by the National Custom and Self Build Association and their political sponsor Richard Bacon, MP. He championed new legislation in 2015 and 2016 to support the acceptance of people building their own homes into mainstream planning and housing policy, and claimed on many occasions that these measures represented 'a bottom-up revolution in how housing is done in the UK'. The Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 requires all councils to put in place a custom-build register of people wishing to build their own homes, and a chapter

of the Housing & Planning Act 2016 describes new duties on councils to ensure an adequate supply of land to satisfy the level of demand on the register.

But could this be genuinely revolutionary? Consider who would *not* want to build their own home if they did not currently have one, could not afford what is available, were dissatisfied with the quality on offer, or could not find one or adapt one to meet their particular needs or wants? The register is thus potentially open to every citizen who would not buy a new home from a house builder or housing association if other options were available. At the very least, the register could be understood as a first step by which the demand side of the housing market could begin to have a genuine voice in housing policy and the way the market works. Perhaps this could be revolutionary. Yet passive membership of a register is unlikely to provide the effective revolutionary spark. The evidence of community organising in both the UK and the USA in achieving political objectives suggests that unless that membership can be organised and mobilised to exert democratic pressure based on evidence of what housing demand really looks like, revolutionary or indeed any other systemic change is unlikely.

The 'power to' not the 'power over' and the problem with 'experts'

My programme of research for the Churchill Fellowship additionally picked up the theme of professional ethics initially explored in 'Justice for the professions or a moment of destiny?'(Hill, 2009b). As part of the Churchill Fellowship, I conducted a research interview with Luke Bretherton, an Anglican priest and currently professor of theological ethics and senior fellow of the Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University, who had been active with the community organising group London Citizens in its early days.

Bretherton proposed a paper, *Civic Agency and the Cult of the Expert* (Boyte, 2009), as a starting point for our discussion at the interview. Boyte had worked with Dr Martin Luther King in the 1960s, advised on Clinton's 'New Covenant' State of the Union speech in 1995, and was still actively developing his 'public work' and 'civic agency' approach, based on 'the capacities of people and communities to solve problems and to generate cultures … community is the living context for evaluating expert knowledge' (Boyte, 2009, 3). Power in the civic agency model is the 'power *to*' not the 'power *over*' (Boyte, 2009, 3 and 37).

Drawing on Boyte's analysis, Bretherton explained:

> The tension between community organising and the local authority is the struggle between the political and the procedural. The local authority response to communities is protective and technocratic, based on the evidence they have and control (of how and about what evidence is collected). Not everyone are friends in this relationship. Politicians usually think they are the good guys, part of the solution. But the very asymmetry of agency between the politician and the community is often the problem, and can misdiagnose the nature of the solution that may be needed. The elected politician understands the point of taking power as giving them a one-off enduring legitimacy, rather than being the start of an ongoing relationship, a consultation. But if it's a consultation, who owns and controls the data? Community organisers must work harder to validate their own data better. They need to be better informed, so they can educate and develop their leaders to have a wider critical perspective of the possible solutions for their members. The 'issue' for community organising is not the issue. It's all about agency, creating leadership and organising capability, of learning about a problem, and being trained to solve it.

This way of thinking about the nature of community organising helps explain the achievement of the Cooper Square Committee and Picture the Homeless. By creating a viable Alternate Plan or collecting their own data, communities could challenge the comfortable political and market-led status quo by reorienting the problem away from the people and towards, for example, the unused resource of land and empty buildings. As Bretherton advised, 'Data isn't everything, it is understanding that there is another way of making policy, through agency: policy formulation is accomplished by policy "doing".' At Cooper Square, there has been over half a century of 'policy doing'.

Prefiguring revolutions and 'taking back control'

Revolutions tend to be bloody. At worst, revolutions destroy political, social and economic capital over generations before benefits begin to flow in the new order. At best, transitions can be less painful if there are already models of what works better. If civic agency or citizen action represents revolutionary behaviour, revolution is already being prefigured by

self-builders, custom build developers, and particularly community housing groups, whether co-ops, CLTs, co-housing, self-help housing, mutual housing associations or development trusts. What all those groups share is a belief that their housing needs are defined by important political ideas about how we need to live more equitably or sustainably, and how citizens might indeed 'take back control' over these important aspects of their lives.

One of the most important but barely noticed political acts of recent years was the inclusion of a legal definition of CLTs in a private amendment to the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, promoted by the National Community Land Trust Network and CDS Co-operatives. CLTs must be set up expressly to further the social, economic and environmental interests or well-being of their communities. They can hold and use assets only for the benefit of the community, and they have to be democratic institutions, locally accountable to their communities.

The primary concern of CLTs in the USA, Canada and the UK has been the dysfunction of the land and housing market in their place. So they frequently decide to stop the land and housing market working in the 'normal' way, by constraining the price of land to ensure that CLT homes are genuinely and permanently affordable, with a defined relationship of housing costs to income.

Whether deliberately or unintentionally, the parliamentary draftsmen at the time created a unique legal concept that does not otherwise exist in the English and Welsh legal system: the giving of democratic legitimacy to communities to ensure land will be used only for the common good. Whatever was in the minds of the lawmakers in 2008, they subsequently adopted the CLT definition to describe the kind of organisation that could give itself planning permission through a Community Right to Build Order in the Localism Act 2011 – a similarly significant, if underused, policy instrument, in which the citizen is empowered to take on the public interest planning functions of the state.

CLTs have no specific legal or financial form, but they do have very clear values and purposes. They were never intended to be a 'model' of community housing, though they are often described as such. They are a political idea that belongs to neither the Left nor the Right. Citizens promoting CLTs are not only 'problem solving', they are 'problem defining'. They embody an approach in which citizens can take the time to explore and understand the complexity of their villages, towns and cities, and their communities and what makes them work. As with the principles of community organising, this is 'policy doing' and it is thus much more revolutionary than was supposed or probably intended by lawmakers, though not by the promoters of the amendment.

Community housing as 'civic agents' rather than revolutionaries

There is a large potential audience for self-build amongst those who have never heard of CLTs, or co-ops or co-housing. The challenge for today's generation of self-build agencies is to engage with citizens at large, who, even though they may never have heard of their brand of community housing, are looking for the qualities of living that they champion: affordability, neighbourliness, mutual support, freedom from debt, sustainable living and personal and collective autonomy.

However, the challenge of 'scaling up' community housing posed by the Building and Social Housing Foundation at their annual consultation in May 2014 (BSHF, 2014) needs to go beyond the horizons and identities of the existing agencies. Some of the solutions found in the JRF research (Hill et al., 2000) are still relevant today. They focused firstly on a more housing market-driven analysis of what actions were needed to 'scale up' levels of housing production, irrespective of the other beneficial outcomes that would be achieved:

- Recognising the role of self-build in local and national housing markets and local housing and labour market strategies, from which it could not be isolated;
- Engaging with the established positions and expectations of power in central and local government and existing housing providers;
- Developing locally appropriate responses to housing needs and land market dysfunction, with access to local knowledge, advice services and production supply chains; and
- Learning greater self-awareness of the effect of the self-build promotional agencies themselves, in the way they defined their purpose, values and identity through the exclusion of others (including each other), however similar they all appeared to outsiders.

The first three of these are challenges which require political responses, to which the last factor is arguably the key. The political initiative must come directly from citizens, however they might be organised. The agencies may therefore need to reimagine themselves as the enablers of citizens in making new relationships with the state with regard to how citizens need to be housed, particularly at the local level, for which the ready availability of technical aid on the full range of possible community housing solutions will be essential.

Self-Help Housing's leadership of the Empty Homes Community Grants Programme 2012–14 achieved impressive and quickly realised

results by bringing over 2,000 empty homes back into use over two years with a wide variety of local civil society organisations.[11] The 'central' advocacy and coordinating agency role played by Self-Help Housing encouraged government to simplify the grant-making process and free it from excessive and lengthy bureaucracy. This liberated local capacity, enthusiasm and creativity to best effect to complete projects on the ground.

Conclusion: a community or citizens' housing alliance?

At the end of my Churchill Fellowship research, I made three main propositions through which civil society could play a more direct and instrumental role in the shaping of housing and planning policy, and lead a change in the political, professional and popular culture about the operation of land and housing markets. The third of these propositions is to build a citizens' housing alliance, bringing together organisations representing or supporting a national demand-side voice in housing policy. This has six aims:

1. Creating an effective voice of the demand side in housing policy, for ordinary citizens and communities of place and interest across the UK, directly influencing government and the supply side about what should be built where, by whom and at what cost.
2. Enabling and supporting the state to develop a pro-housing narrative, and to gain the consent of the public to building 'more homes near them'.
3. Developing a strong shared identity and set of 'common good' values and objectives across a range of community housing interests and organisations.
4. Gaining political and popular recognition for citizen-inspired housing as an expression of both the demand side – 'what people really need and want' – and as part of the supply side – 'we will do it *our* way'.
5. Creating a more open culture in councils and housing providers to include citizen-inspired housing as a normal choice in the building of new homes and reusing empty properties.
6. Ensuring that the resources and opportunities needed by citizens to create their own housing solutions are included as a matter of course in policy initiatives that support other already-established supply-side institutions.

This agenda for democratising the operation of land and housing markets goes some way beyond the role allocated to communities and active citizens in both the watered-down Double Devolution reforms under New Labour in the early 2000s and the weak community rights relating to land and property included in the Coalition government's Localism Act 2011. The abandonment of a genuine devolution of power to communities in the local government reforms of the 2000s was partly softened by greater focus on community asset transfer.

It is possible to regard the asset transfer initiative, however, as little more than a consolatory and diversionary substitute for the real transfer of power to communities that had been on offer – reflecting, perhaps, the views of those JRF interviewees in positions of power (Hill et al., 2000) who had regarded communities as 'the other', neither worthy of public policy support nor capable of responsible autonomous action, and certainly not as credible and necessary partners in Bretherton's 'policy-making by doing' or sharing of power.

Now, given the conspicuous failure of policy and the market to create well-ordered and fair land and housing markets that respond to demand, active citizenship is clearly needed to refocus political attention on some fundamentals: what all citizens need, and can and should be able to afford in the national interest. The task of citizens seeking their own solutions at scale, therefore, is not to become part of the mainstream, but to reshape the mainstream. All mainstream institutions will naturally aim to neutralise or marginalise challenges to their currently dominant positon.

'Community housing' or 'citizen-inspired housing' may be 'small' for many reasons, but the ambition of the demand side cannot be small. Community housing could just as well be 'large', if that is what is needed.[12] What is crucial is the local control and autonomy of citizens to make their own choices throughout the process of development into management and ownership. Citizens have to give themselves the power to tackle the difficult structural defects that politicians are afraid or unable to deal with on their own. More informed citizens and politicians can achieve outcomes that neither could achieve on their own, co-designing the actions needed to create a fair housing market and to maintain fair housing policies into the future – better together, in fact.

What will that new configuration look like? The foundation of systemic change must be widespread presence wherever civic agency or citizen action emerges in response to a perceived need for national or local policy change and intervention in markets that are not working for the common good. Citizen action needs to be integrated into local, sub-regional or regional political systems, with access to advice and the

Figure 14.5 6,000 members of London Citizens at the April 2016 London mayoral hustings hear mayoral candidates promise to support CLTs and co-housing (© Stephen Hill)

supply chains of professional services, financial capital and development capacity needed to create new and locally appropriate housing choices.

The interplay between bottom-up citizen action and top-down planning and resource allocation needs to create a policy environment in which national housing priorities and policies are properly informed by local knowledge. All the technical resources, financial products, skills and experience of the existing agencies could be integrated to this end, as the practicalities of housing development are broadly the same whatever other social, economic and environmental outcomes are desired by citizens.

The focus on the local should not be confused with sentimental attachment to the apparent merits of 'small is beautiful' or 'small and special'. Market making is a quite different activity from operating within the essentially administrative functions that are prescribed by the limited ambition of the community rights in the Localism Act 2011, a bureaucratic understanding of housing that will change little. The task of local housing action is ambitious, both to inform national action and policy and to change the mainstream.

Whatever else any new configuration of community housing agencies may turn out to be, therefore, it must be focused primarily

on connecting with future and currently unmet demand, understanding what that demand represents and what is needed for it to be fully realised. Looking at the past, or what is currently done, has little value, beyond the nurturing of existing identities and organisational forms that have, by definition, already demonstrated their own limitations for 'scaling up'.

Just as the protection of the identities and organisational models led to the decline of the community self-build agencies in the early 2000s, the current generation of community housing support organisations need to be courageous in reinventing themselves to take advantage of new political opportunities and market realities. As Steve Wyler, then interim director of the Development Trusts Association, interviewed for the JRF research 1999–2000, wisely stated, 'The trick for self-build is not to stay in the "small and special" box too long.' Self-build housing has been in the 'small and special box' long enough already.

Conclusion

New directions: self-build, social values and lived experience

Iqbal Hamiduddin and Michaela Benson

A deceptively simple question threads through the contributions to this volume: why self-build?

We began this exploration of self-build in the United Kingdom, the low water mark of the sector by both international standards and against its own historic background. We then embarked on a veritable odyssey, pausing to reflect on what the UK needs to do to turn the tide and allow a steady flood of self-build. The remainder of the volume charted the diverse routes through self-build, bringing together experiences and reflections on the process of building. It drew out the individual and collective social outcomes, charted by way of case studies, mostly from Britain, but some from beyond these shores, from Germany and the Netherlands, where the tide has until now been considerably higher. This voyage revealed how practices of self-build articulate with the social, the meanings, relations and experiences caught up and reproduced in the provision of these homes. As Pickerill (this volume) so aptly explains, 'not just what socio-cultural factors are implicated in self-build, but in particular how these socio-cultural processes are of relevance to understanding self-build'. In this way, the chapters in this volume have offered a range of insights into the ways that individuals, households and communities are shaped by housing experiences, introducing and exploring understandings of social values and the lived experience through self-build housing. These insights are invaluable in thinking not only about self-build, but housing more generally.

Now, at the end of the voyage, we piece the individual tales, snippets and observations together to reveal an altogether jarring but obvious answer to the question: we should build because in building we

construct not only a house, but home, 'a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and which construct places, extend across spaces and scales, and connect places' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006, 2).

Social values and investments

In retraining focus onto the social, the contributions to the volume variously draw out how self-build homes are a repository of social values and investments that run counter to normative understandings of housing and homes. This feeds into the wider critique of the workings of housing under capitalism, the systemic causes of the housing crisis, and the commodification of housing (Dorling, 2014; Madden and Marcuse, 2016), while also pointing to the ways in which housing research tends towards explanations that are light on the social and cultural dimensions of housing practices and experience. Through the pages of this volume, self-build as a housing practice is one imbued with values, investments and meanings that extend beyond mere economic rationalities, and into the social and affective.

This might cause us to reconsider the terms on which we understand housing and its production. Forde's contribution to this volume, which offers a view from social anthropology, stresses that a shift towards understanding housing as provisioning – a concept intended to capture the social relations involved in production, distribution, circulation and consumption (Narotzky, 2005) – might lay the groundwork for an understanding of housing as a social process. Heslop goes one step further; through her participatory action research with homeless people to produce a Protohome, she renews the call for anarchic, participatory housing. This is a call that is particularly timely and urgent as a way of countering the inequalities in housing inherent in the current speculative development and market economy of housing in austerity Britain. Questioning the form of housing production, Heslop demonstrates the need to think again about how we understand housing production and the relations of power this embeds. For Pickerill, the socio-cultural is essential to understanding why eco-homes have been taken up at scale; building affordable eco-homes that deliver on their promise of reducing resource reliance and demand requires finding a balance that both recognises what people seek in a home – e.g. comfort – and offers alternative, less resource-intensive, practices to support these (see also Pickerill, 2016). From Forde and Pickerill's eco-homes to Heslop's Protohome,

self-build's potential as a social and political project that produces sustainable and affordable housing is rendered visible.

Self-build might also have a value at the level of the neighbourhood. Hamiduddin argues for the recognition of the impact of collective self-build projects on urban development. Turning to Freiburg's Vauban, he documents the remarkably strong social bonds that characterise the scheme, and the conflation of the social and the physical necessary in the production of new urban commons, respected and enjoyed by all. The same is also undoubtedly true in rural settings too, although here the importance of engaging with local communities is perhaps particularly salient. In her contribution, Pickerill tracks a rather familiar narrative of resistance to development on the part of existing residents near the Lammas site, but their initial frostiness begins to thaw through a better understanding of the scheme, the settlers and its contribution to the local community, and as a result of the outreach of the project members and their improved understanding of and sensitivity to the place of Glandwr. Similarly, Heffernan and de Wilde document how group self-build feeds into the development of diverse and cohesive societies, neighbours to the schemes celebrating 'something wonderful in my back yard'. These insights echo the lessons from Tübingen's 'living laboratory' outlined in Feldtkeller's chapter, which took an approach to urban planning that encouraged *Baugruppen* to be actively involved in the development of neighbourhoods for living and working. In this way, these chapters reveal how collective self-build projects may contribute positively to the social fabric of neighbourhoods. While it would be speculative to suggest that self-build – across its different approaches and types (as outlined in our introduction) – is necessarily more acceptable to local communities than developer-led housing, it is perhaps easier for communities to engage with households or groups, rather than a corporation experienced and resourced in overcoming local objections.

Social values and investments are not a by-product of self-build, but an integral feature. Self-build then is about imagining (and hopefully realising) alternative ways of living – whether in community, sustainably, affordably – that have the potential to trouble understandings of how housing (and development) happens and the values it reproduces. Our use of the term 'alternative' is significant here, representing the challenge that self-build presents to the normative understandings of home and housing. To reiterate, this is not simply a question of form or style, but about fundamentally questioning the social life and structures of housing. Within the wider frame of housing research, it calls us to ask once again what people want from housing.

Lived experience: the social and emotional work of self-build

The realisation of these alternative visions of housing and the ways of life they support and allow is by no means straightforward. The unfettered reality of self-build explored in this volume seems rarely to be exposed beyond the knowing exposés of popular television programmes. Self-build is a process that unfolds over time, a process that entails both housebuilding and homemaking. Home – as both material dwelling and as a set of meanings – is at the core of this process. It is perhaps unsurprising then that self-build is an emotional process, with attendant risks as well as benefits to well-being. As Benson illustrates in her chapter, it should not be assumed that the experiences of the build – or the home after completion – will necessarily be happy or positive, particularly where a project faces difficulties or a household's circumstances change. Indeed, the process is often less obviously cathartic or enjoyable than one would hope for, and the end product may not be as we might have hoped, but nor does satisfaction or a deeper sense of gratification necessarily mean conscious pleasure.

Beyond the personal risks associated with emotional investment in an individual self-build project that Benson exposes so poignantly in her chapter, Fernández Arrigoitia and Scanlon recount the dynamics of co-housing group formation. Through their chapter, they highlight how the time and energy invested in the practicalities and in overcoming the numerous obstacles to development correlate with a seeming lack of emotional commitment to the group. In turn, this compounds the practical difficulties of taking the scheme forward. The dilemma of being in or out of 'the group' is powerfully exposed in Collins's narratives of ex-servicemen, weighing the emotional benefits of camaraderie through joint venture as well as the material benefits of home, with the risks of social entrapment and commitment to a small group where some characters (perhaps inevitably) simply don't get along. Heslop's participatory housing project centres on these interpersonal dynamics, which she sees as particularly delicate when working with vulnerable populations; this underpins the project's aims and ambitions from the outset and is reflected in considerations over training, dialogue, process and practice. More so in these two chapters – Collins and Heslop – than in others, the consideration of social relations and what is at stake for individuals involved in such projects becomes critical and vital. Beyond these particular cases, it also points to the need for the careful consideration and

management of the social relations within groups and between amateurs and professionals.

The social work of a self-build does not end with a completed house; to extend the question at the heart of Benson's chapter, when does a self-build – as homemaking – finish? As continuous act, it is not clear whether there is an end point to homemaking; the social relations that home is intended to support are not *faits accomplis* but also require work and maintenance. Forde recounts how the 'big house' becomes the hearth of Y Mynydd, a way of reaffirming the relationships of household that stretch across the eco-village. The expectations of the older people involved in senior co-housing that Hudson recalls tell of a form of ageing-in-community – in part, a pragmatic solution to the changing landscapes of health and social care in the United Kingdom that redeploys their accumulated housing assets, but also a response to their fears of social disconnection.

Many lessons have been identified through the lived experiences of different schemes. These range from attention to detail in the seemingly innocuous aspects of bureaucracy, which may mitigate against heartache in later stages of a build, to ensuring that prospective residents commit financially in the early stages of a collective or community build project to avoid the corrosive effects of continuous turnover. Yet project risks can never be entirely discounted in self-build – an aspect that provides a thrill of freedom, responsibility and satisfaction, if not always the more immediate and continual sense of pleasure and enjoyment. Inevitably, the risk increases when the less experienced take on a substantial burden of work without the financial means to draw additional assistance in, or without full knowledge and understanding of the process, as in the case of some group projects. In the latter case, clear route maps to development might be one solution, but it is also the case that without a critical mass of self-builders within a geographical community it is difficult to harness and circulate knowledge and experiences gained from problem solving through the build process. Heslop's account of Protohome offers a blueprint for participatory housing and, as Stevens emphasises, there is an urgent need to learn lessons from elsewhere rather than to reinvent the wheel. But it is also clear that face-to-face dialogue, site visits and demonstrations have a role to play. Self-build groups, such as Bath-based Build-a-Dream Self-Build Association and Bristol-based EcoMotive, should have their role in knowledge sharing and dissemination reinvigorated to provide mutual support and learning in local communities to complement the UK's renewed interest in self-build.

Shifting focus: from housing to home and homemaking

By reflecting on the social importance of having a place to call home at the outset of this volume, we explored the specific role that self-build can play in transcending the often transactional start to homemaking to provide an outlet for self-expression, rootedness and practical realisation. Although these themes often arise in the popular literature and media coverage of self-build, they receive only scant or tacit acknowledgement in policy discussions that follow quite linear, often economically couched arguments around housebuilding targets, market diversification and cost savings, which are important aspects of the case for self-build but only one part of the whole picture. Indeed, because the language of planning policy tends to fixate on 'housing' as a product to fulfil material needs, it is easy to overlook the aspects of 'home' that serve an equally important role in individual and collective social agency that connects, in turn, with other policy areas such as health and well-being.

In countries dominated by speculative housebuilding, policy-makers seem unable or unwilling to connect the mono-production of developer-led housing with paucity of urban quality, a continuing failure to capitalise on the opportunity for the creation of new homes to be the cornerstone of the production of high quality urbanism that enriches life beyond the private realm (see chapters by Feldtkeller and Hamiduddin, this volume). As Feldtkeller notes in his chapter, a 'new piece of the city' is developed plot-by-plot, buildings individually designed and realised and with mixed uses at street level in an integrated ('late-urban') mode of production as so clearly demonstrated by Tübingen's Loretto and French Quarter areas. Yet in many countries we seem to have entirely given up on the idea that new developments should be socially and economically vibrant nodes, new places that represent new pieces of urbanism, rather than dormitory style suburbs where life is largely absent during the working day because they are disconnected from the other necessary functions of life. There is therefore a strong rationale for introducing the terms 'home' and 'living quarters' into the lexicon of development, alongside 'housebuilding', in countries where the social narrative struggles to be heard. Self-build would fit more comfortably within the broader dialogue of *home* than it does currently within the language of *housing*, and Benson's affective factors that connect with the social rationale would be more implicitly understood.

This emphasis on the affective dimension of home does not diminish the more rational or 'instrumental' arguments for self-build, which

include the greater affordability, building qualities or yield that have often come to dominate policy discussions over self-build. Several authors in this volume have noted self-build's role to serve as a portal of access to the heated home-buying market in some countries, provided that access to land and development finance exist. There have been some interesting recent developments in the UK, with the use of rural exception sites for affordable self-build housing (see Shropshire's affordable self-build homes programme) and a related idea to provide for self-build locally through community land trusts to guarantee the affordability of housing in perpetuity. Given the extent and depth of the UK's housing crisis there might also be a case for recognising and supporting the contribution of 'sweat equity'. Walter Segal's scheme in Lewisham, South London, remains a conspicuously solitary example of a sweat equity project where households drawn from the social housing waiting list were given sufficient training in basic trade skills to allow them to construct their own homes on public land. The sweat equity input of households into the construction of their home formed a significant part of their contribution towards the 99-year lease on their home. There are also instances of sweat equity being recognised by banks in lieu of a financial contribution. In Newfoundland, for example, 500 homes were constructed from 1920 to 1974 through sweat equity arrangements that saw households contribute 200 hours of labour to the construction of homes to replace the 20 per cent deposit normally required by mortgage lenders (Sharpe and Shawyer, 2016). These days, it is quite normal for self-builders to economise on building costs by using sweat equity to add the finishing touches to a build, but there must surely be a case for recognising sweat equity alongside financial capital once again. Indeed, such approaches point to the potential for self-build to provide routes into housing for those in significant housing need, as in the case of the pioneering schemes documented in the contributions to this volume by Collins and Heslop.

New directions

This volume closed with powerful expositions of Britain's current sclerosis in self-build by two of the commentators best qualified in the field. Firstly, Stevens pinpointed the principal causes of the current stagnation, using these to set out a manifesto for change, while Hill explored the practical steps that could allow the sector to up-scale and become a major contributor to housing delivery in the UK. Between them, these two chapters provide a practical, real-world grounding for a volume that

set out to try to move the discussion along by attempting to articulate the less tangible rationales, experiences and outcomes of self-build in a convincing manner. We believe that the contributors to this volume have risen to this challenge, and in doing so have exposed both the detail and the true complexity of societal-built environment relationships.

The original intention of this volume was not to become overly fixated on the UK and what it should or shouldn't be doing to assist self-build. Having cast some light on the question of why self-build, one important lesson for those countries with a self-build sector must surely be to keep supporting it and not to allow speculative housing to dominate the market, as it has come to do in the UK. The jury remains out on whether the term 'self-build' represents the best term for the sector – with its connotations of DIY – or whether 'self-provided' housing might better reflect both the range of delivery approaches and the soft boundary from new build to conversions, renovations or even temporary and liminal arrangements. It is also clear that, while self-build has the potential to challenge normative understandings of housing and home, it remains constrained by the structures of the housing and land economy, from finance to planning regulation and development objectives. Indeed, Field's evaluation of the extent to which recommendations and obligations for local authorities measure demand for self-build and put in place mechanisms to support it makes salutary reading, the lack of familiarity with forms of self-build and community-led development being central to the main take-home message. It seems that more extensive programmes of education might be required if these modes of development are to deliver their potential for changes to housing. Field also draws out a tendency to focus solely on private home ownership in the face of a range of possible other tenure arrangements. It seems that difficulties arise when a larger scheme sets out to try to include a range of different tenures. This was the case at Featherstone Lodge, where Fernández Aggiroitia and Scanlon noted that prospective residents for affordable housing could not be identified to integrate with the project team at an early stage of planning, given the unknown timescales involved. It seems that the diversity of approaches and delivery models would cover most preferences and circumstances for prospective self-builders. This is unlikely to be the case with tenure models across many countries. If self-build homes and the new communities created by them are to be accessible to all, then tenure mix must be an area for future work.

We close by emphasising that self-build is by no means a panacea for the problems of the housing economy. Neither has it been our ambition in this volume to advocate self-build. Rather, we have expanded the

conversation about self-build in ways that consider its diversity, the centrality of social values, investment and relations to its delivery, and what it signifies in terms of people's imaginings of how to live and the housing that supports these. Self-build might, at best, be considered as embryonic in the United Kingdom, but in utilising the continuingly relevant policy issue of self-build, this volume has repositioned housing research within the broad social science context, thinking through how individuals and communities are shaped by their housing experience and offering new directions for housing studies by introducing and exploring understandings of social values and the lived experience through self-build housing.

Notes

Chapter 1

1 However, it is important to note that there are significant variations around this average. The uptake of self-build is notably higher in the devolved regions of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, where planning regulations and other structures function differently, and lower in London and the southeast of England, probably as a consequence of high land values and low availability.

Chapter 3

1 See House of Commons Library (2014, 2015).

2 It should be noted here that these acknowledge the patchy collation of data on overall amounts of housing development activity that occurs in the UK.

3 There remains a relatively under-documented history of the period, predominantly after World War II and through to the 1980s, when 'self-build consultants' organised the acquisition of land and finance for housebuilding projects and pulled together a bunch of individual builders, who would complement each other with one or more of the skills required to help construct new properties, and who would collaborate to complete them all before gaining permission to take up permanent residence in one of them.

4 Background details to ENHR workshops held in Belfast in summer 2016, and in Delft in autumn 2016.

5 There is confusion between the use of the term 'cohousing' as a typology of one specific approach to neighbourhood development, and 'co-housing' (with a 'hyphen') as a general term that commentators (particularly in academic works) have used to denote collaborative housing projects *in general*. 'Cohousing' is solely used in this chapter as a *typology of neighbourhood development activity*.

6 For some individuals or agencies a key motivation may be to create a property-based profit or other assets. An exploration of this aspect is outside the scope of this chapter, but can be followed up elsewhere, such as at www.buildstore.co.uk/mykindofhome/events/developing-for-profit.html

7 See BSHF (2015).

8 Countries like Holland and Germany, where land resources are often more directly managed by local and municipal authorities than is the case in the UK, can demonstrate dynamic mixes of both conventional *and* community-led approaches, at times side-by-side in the provision of local housing supplies – see Guerra (2008); Hamiduddin and Daseking (2014).

9 Cf. Self-build and Custom Housebuilding (Register) Regulations 2016 (HM Government, 2016).

10 Only five authority areas from the different areas considered had all their most important strategies adopted *before* 2012 – i.e. before the implementation of the National Planning Policy Framework – and only one of these had all its documents agreed and adopted pre-2011.

11 Excluded from this methodology was (a) an attempt to locate any specific wording of a potential for 'local asset transfers' (i.e. land or buildings) to support future collective housing initiatives; (b) any examination of policies from other public-sector or quasi-public-sector bodies – such as

health authorities or local housing associations and registered housing providers, or in-house council housing providers (where these remain).

12 A Community Right to Build Order is a type of Neighbourhood Development Order and forms one of the neighbourhood planning tools introduced in the Localism Act 2011 – cf. Planning Advice Service/LGA (2015).

Chapter 4

1 All photographs were taken by the author and are © Jenny Pickerill.
2 Whole-life refers to all processes that form part of a building's life cycle (sourcing raw materials, product manufacture, design, construction, operation, maintenance, and refurbishment at the end of a building's life).
3 The regional director of a large national construction company quoted in Goodchild and Walshaw (2011).
4 Chuck Marsh of Earthhaven eco-community, USA, quoted in Leafe Christian, (2003, 47).
5 This is a pseudonym for an eco-community that does not want its location and existence identified.

Chapter 5

1 This is a pseudonym used to protect the anonymity of those participating in the research.

Chapter 6

1 Find out more at www.protohome.org.uk

Chapter 7

1 This framework sees the home as including multiple spatial, temporal, political and psychic/subjective scales. It 'combines a recognition of the social and material interrelations of the home with imaginary realms; with the political at different scales; the subjective and collective; and the past, present, and future' (Fernández Arrigoitia, 2014, 172).
2 For a fuller discussion of turnover in the group up to 2014, see Scanlon and Fernández (2015).
3 Following Bruno Latour's (2005) notion of the construction of the social through a multiplicity of non-social ties, she notes that 'the architectural' also includes things like 'design thinking, material and formal experiments, computer measurements and physical models, on-screen renderings, presentations, reactions to mock-ups and community protests' (Yaneva, 2010, 142).

Chapter 8

1 *Grand Designs* is Channel 4's long-standing self-build programme. Initially aired in 1999, it is in its 16th series at the time of writing and is broadcast in over 15 countries around the world.
2 This was a programme of residential architecture experiments in the US – mostly built in Los Angeles – sponsored by the magazine *Arts & Architecture*. It ran from the 1940s to the 1960s and focused on building inexpensive and efficient model homes.

Chapter 13

1   NaCSBA revealed these figures at its Right to Build Summit in the House of Commons in April 2016. To find out more, visit www.nacsba.org.uk/news/2016/04/13/nacsbas-right-to-build-summit/

2   To find out more about Eco-Logis co-housing, visit customandselfbuildtoolkit.org.uk/case-studies/group-projects-in-strasbourg/#

3   To find out more about Teignbridge's approach to self-build, visit www.teignbridge.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=45441&p=0

4   To find out more about Broadhempston, visit customandselfbuildtoolkit.org.uk/case-studies/broadhempston-clt-devon/#

5   See custombuildhomes.co.uk/

6   See www.selfbuildportal.org.uk/needaplot

7   To find out more about the Eleven Friends scheme, visit customandselfbuildtoolkit.org.uk/case-studies/elf-freunde-berlin/#

8   As reported in the NaCSBA press release, 3 December 2015 – www.nacsba.org.uk/images/press-releases/nacsbapresser_20151203SAC.pdf

Chapter 14

1   For a longer discussion on the role of communities in the local government reforms of the early 2000s, see the account in stephenhillfutureplanning.blogspot.co.uk/2016/07/10.html

2   The Cooper Square Committee remains active to this day Its 'mission is to work with area residents to contribute to the preservation and development of affordable, environmentally healthy housing and community/cultural spaces so that the Cooper Square area remains racially, economically and culturally diverse' (2009: npg). They have an active web presence, and can be found online at Coopersquare.org/about-us/mission-brochure

3   www1.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdf/community/east-harlem-housing-plan-draft.pdf

4   artfcity.com/2014/05/13/the-plan-that-could-fend-off-real-estate-frances-goldin-and-the-cooper-square-committee/

5   Inter alia, usir.salford.ac.uk/19312/2/Proof_of_Concept_Final.pdf

6   Find out more about (East) London Community Land Trust at www.londonclt.org

7   In 2007, young people on the estate made the short film *Beyond a Hoodie*, available online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gbX_wCHlzo, in response to the stigmatisation of their home area and the people who lived there, as promoted in a TV documentary made by former MP Ann Widdecombe.

8   Find out more about the Andover Future Forum in section 4 of www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/where_can_we_build_more_homes.pdf and www.islingtongazette.co.uk/news/islington-council-slammed-for-backtracking-on-award-winning-holloway-estate-plan-1-4057240

9   Find out more about the Placemaking Awards at www.placemakingresource.com/article/1323931/case-study-community-led-approach-estate-renewal

10 Email from Islington Council officer to chair of the Andover Forum and others, dated 24 July 2014.

11 The role of Self-Help Housing in the Empty Homes Community Grants Programme 2012–14 and its impacts are documented in this evaluation study: Research www.slideshare.net/HACThousing/david-mullins-the-best-thing-ehcgp-research

12 For recent analysis on the potential of larger community housing projects in city-scale tasks, see www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/jan/16/radical-model-housing-crisis-property-prices-income-community-land-trusts#comment-91295615 and the role of community housing in the Shelter's March 2017 New Civic Housebuilding Manifesto, civichousebuilding.org and civichousebuilding.org/big-bold-and-beautiful-with-soul/

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Index

Self-Build Homes connects the burgeoning interdisciplinary research on self-build with commentary from leading international figures in the self-build and wider housing sector. Through their focus on community, dwelling, home and identity, the chapters explore the various meanings of self-build housing, encouraging new directions for discussions about self-building and calling for the recognition of the social dimensions of this process, from consideration of the structures, policies and practices that shape it, through to the lived experience of individuals and households.

Divided into four parts – Discourse, Rationale, Meaning; Values, Lifestyles, Imaginaries; Community and Identity; and Perspectives from Practice – the volume comes at a time of renewed focus from policy managers and practitioners, as well as prospective builders themselves, on self-build as a means for producing homes that are more stylised, affordable and appropriate for the specific needs of households. It responds to recent advances in housing and planning policy, while also bringing this into conversation with interdisciplinary perspectives from across the social sciences on housing, home and homemaking. In this way, the book seeks to update understandings of self-build and to account for housing as a distinctly social process.

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